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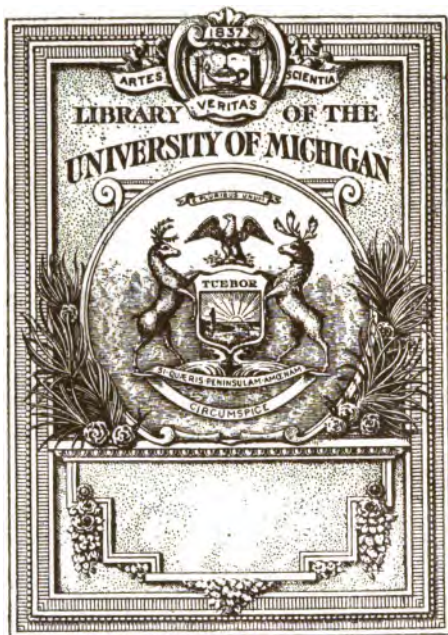
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AN OCTAVE OF FRIENDS

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AN OCTAVE OF FRIENDS

WITH OTHER



Silhouettes and Stories

BY

E. LYNN LINTON, *Mrs. Elizabeth Linton*

AUTHOR OF 'GRASP YOUR NETTLE' 'PATRICIA KEMBALL' ETC.

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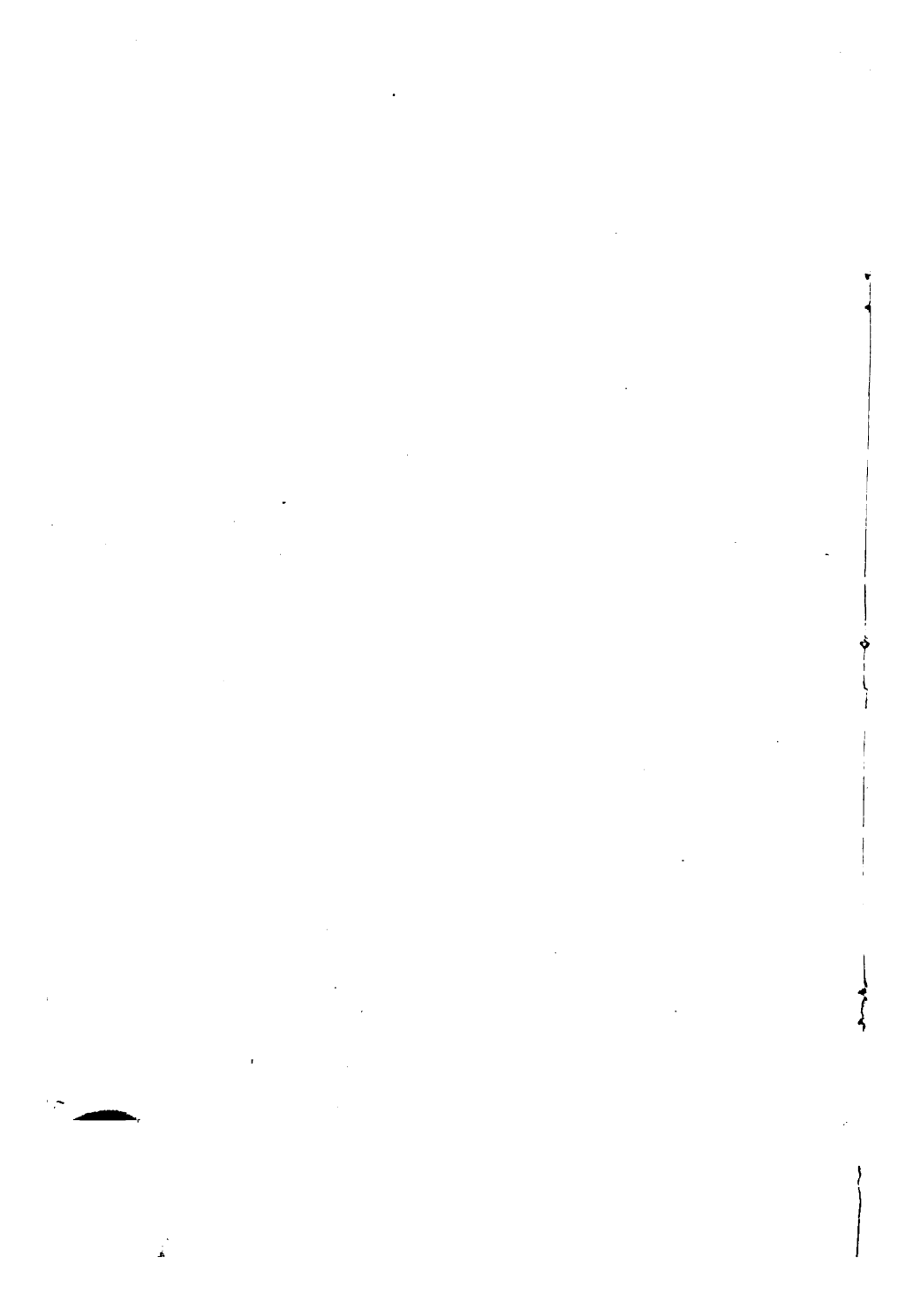
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PREFACE

THESE stories and sketches were written in the days of crinoline, croquet, and the violent purples of the then new aniline dyes. The stories somewhat betray their date, but the sketches are still true of the people one daily meets in Vanity Fair. Like all caps made for types, not individuals, they fit as well to-day as yesterday. The various archaic little touches which come into this bygone work demand this short explanation; for each generation has its own hall-marks, and what was the best in one age is out of date in another. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that enough remains of general interest to make this little book acceptable to the public.

E. LYNN LINTON.



CONTENTS

AN OCTAVE OF FRIENDS

	PAGE
I. AMY SILVERTONGUE	1
II. ODO CROSSGRAINE	9
III. THE VESPAS	17
IV. THE BROTHERS DOWNRIGHT	24
V. THE MUSTELAS	33
VI. JOHN LUCKLESS	41
VII. THE TURNER VANES	48
VIII. THE TRUEPENNIES	56

<i>SOULS IN MUFTI</i>	65
---------------------------------	----

<i>COURTSHIP AND MATRIMONY</i>	81
--	----

STORIES

I. MY FIRST SOIRÉE	91
II. 'FAITHFUL AND TRUE'	108
III. SNOWED UP WITH A BURGLAR	207
IV. ROSE BLACKETT AND HER LOVERS	245
V. MADAME DUFOUR	273

AN OCTAVE OF FRIENDS

I

AMY SILVERTONGUE

I HAVE a rather fine array of friends. People say that one true friend is as much as you can expect in a lifetime; but I have eight—a full octave—so that I ought to think myself exceptionally lucky; and I do so. I will give you a description of them; and I will begin with Amy Silvertongue.

There was never a more affectionate creature than Amy Silvertongue. She positively worships me—so she says; looks on me as her moral guide and personal paragon; and praises me to my face with such artless *abandon* that I sometimes wish the earth would open and swallow me—or her—for very shame at the excess of her flattery. She lets the world at large know her devotion, and does her best to make it share her enthusiasm. Wherever she goes she sounds my praises, on no tinkling cymbal with its half-

notes and uncertain sounds, but through a six-foot trumpet that allows of no mistake as to what she means. I should think people must be tired of hearing of me and my virtues. I am sure I should hate those I heard so extravagantly and perpetually belauded, and be inclined to deny that they possessed even the most elementary morals, if their trumpeters tried to thrust them down my throat as such a bit of absolute perfection as Amy Silvertongue makes me out to be when she thrusts me down the throats of her friends and acquaintances.

And the odd part of it is, that I really do not know her very well. I saw her for a few weeks last summer down at Harpenden: when I lodged at one side of the common and she had her quarters at the other, and we met among the furze-bushes on occasions: and that was all. But since then she has taken possession of me, as it were, and speaks of me to my oldest friends as if no one but herself understands me; telling the most ordinary circumstances of my life, which might be published at the market-cross, as so many confidences made exclusively to her as my chosen confidante—which she is not. I wish she would not talk so much about me; and I rather think she does me a great deal of harm, though of course the good creature means

only to do me service. But it is curious how, since last summer, people whom Amy knows, and with whom I used to have pleasant relations enough, now look quite coldly on me ; and I am as often as not met with some covert sneer at my superhuman virtues, which render such poor, clay-footed mortals as they are unfit company for me. Why, the Vespas all but cut me last week ; and Mrs. Vespa said with an uncomfortable smile, that, from what Amy Silvertongue had said of me, she really felt she ought to apologise for her presumption in asking me to visit *them*. And I like the Vespas well enough, and am far from feeling them inferior to myself in any particular ; except, perhaps, in temper. At all events, I was sorry at the way in which Mrs. Vespa had taken Amy's eulogiums on me, and felt crimson with shame and vexation.

Amy is so fond of me too, that she not only exaggerates any little good I may possess, till she makes it—of course quite unintentionally—more disagreeable than a fault, but she even sees my real faults as virtues. She must do so, else she would not tell everybody of them as she does. I am perhaps a little too punctual, a little too intolerant of slipshod disorder in my own establishment ; but I care nothing what

other people do in their establishments, which are not mine. I am not my brother's keeper, inside his castle or out ; but Amy paints me as the incarnation of priggish severity, which she calls by certain fine names that gild but do not disguise, and to which there is only one and the same hidden meaning of hateful pedantry. And once when I was dining at Mrs. Laglast's, she made that innocent little woman absurdly timid and uncomfortable by her whispered exhortations to do this, and not to do that, because I was there. It was very kind of her to cater for me so ; but she would have done better to leave me alone and allow me to glide into the no-order patronised by pretty, *décousue* little Mrs. Laglast ; for I liked that unconscious, scrambling, untidy young woman, and I wished to be friends with her. As it was, Amy frightened her so that she will never get over her first disagreeable impression of me ; and to the last I shall be a kind of bogie in her mind, critical, severe, unbending, whose presence will be a damper and a restraint, and on whose kind feeling she will have no reliance whatever I may say or do.

If Amy Silvertongue is the only friend I have who sees me, faults and all, as so much perfection incarnate, I am by no means the only perfect friend she has. I have often envied her

the good fortune which seems to have guided her in her choice of intimates. She knows such remarkable people! It is very interesting to hear her speak of them. For instance, there are the Smiths, who, she says, are the most refined, the Browns the most learned, the Joneses the most amiable, people in the world. I confess I could not quite see it when I was introduced to them; for Mrs. Smith dropped her h's, though, to be sure, she was charmingly dressed—Brown made a gross mistake about English history in the thirteenth century, which he had got all mixed up with the fifteenth on a point with which I happened to be acquainted; but then he talked a great deal about Kelts and Kymri, kistvaens and the prehistoric man, the polariscope, and the new chemical formulæ, of all of which I knew nothing. And I did not fully realise the amiability of the Joneses, when Amy herself told me how they had turned a poor servant-girl out of the house at a minute's notice, only on suspicion—not proof—and would neither give her a character nor allow her to defend herself. But then Amy is so good-natured she always sees things at their best; and though she laughed to me at Mrs. Smith's lapse of manners the other day, when that worthy lady would persist in talking to Sir

James Grubbe, the retired candlemaker, on the merits of ozokerit and the illuminating power of wax—to poor Sir James's visible chagrin—yet she still goes back on the same theme; and two minutes after you may hear her declare that Mrs. Smith is the best-bred woman she knows, and quite a study for everyone to copy.

Amy Silvertongue is so far comforting that she never allows one's most patent defects to pass as defects. All the clouds that float on the horizon of her friends have not only silver linings, but are silver all through. If anyone is shabbily dressed, the attention of the room is called to that fact under the text of being 'distinguished by artistic negligence;' a fit of ill-humour is commented on and brought out into the light as 'gravity,' 'thoughtfulness,' or 'a righteous indignation;' an indiscreet confidence is retailed as an evidence of the babblers' 'childlike candour,' and every person of her acquaintance is made free of the confession as a proof of the transparent innocence of the confessor. To this day my uncle Hunks, who despises both Amy and sieves, holds me as a sieve because Amy ran open-mouthed to him in my praise, telling him something I had just been weak enough to whisper to her in confidence. My uncle has not forgotten this, and

never will; and he told me frankly enough, if also surlily enough, that he had no idea of leaving his money to a fool who could not keep a quiet tongue or his own counsel. That moment of injudicious praise on Amy's part has, I feel convinced, cost me my assigned legacy.

One fact, however, I have noticed in Amy Silvertongue's life—she does not keep her friends. One by one those around whom she has flung her arms in public, and shown to the gaping world as her dearest and nearest—those whom she has flattered to their faces and vaunted behind their backs as the best and noblest and most delightful darlings in existence, yet to whom, unfortunately—I don't know how or why—she has brought more enmity than friendship, and against whom she has roused a general antagonism throughout society—one by one they fall away from her; and let her down more or less easily. Each season finds her with a new set of black swans, but the old ones have deserted her lures. I really think that I must do the same; for her flattery to my face abashes and humiliates me; her praises seem to do me more substantial damage than the outspoken blame of the bitterest enemy; and her patronage, which is as oppressive as all the rest, puts me

in a false position, and hurts my pride as well as my prospects, while it lowers my social status frightfully. I wonder if Amy Silvertongue is the nice, artless, and affectionate creature she passes for, or if she is as clever as other people, and 'knows her world' like the best? For, to be frank, I think her system of paragons means really a system of social steps, on the principle of like to like; for if you are not the rose, the next best thing is to be near it.

II

ODO CROSSGRAINE

IF Amy Silvertongue is at one end of the scale, Odo Crossgraine is at the other. With the one I have no faults, with the other I am allowed next to no virtues. If perpetual putting to rights and hearing disagreeable truths plainly stated, would make men perfect, Crossgraine's friends would be the very salt of the earth. He seems to think he was born to be the moral Bumble of his circle; and he certainly does his work with a will. I never knew anyone with such a horror of flattery or weak compliance as Odo Crossgraine—never one with such a stern sense of right and wrong. And the worst is, he is so sharp you cannot take him in. Do your best to conceal any little peccadillo you may have committed, and he is down on you like a hawk on a hedge-sparrow. He is not

to be hoodwinked, he says; and he lets you know it.

You, Edmund Moneyman, went to the Derby, did you? and lost a pony on the favourite? Odo Crossgraine knows all about it; though how the mischief he found it out passed your comprehension; and he takes you aside in your own drawing-room and lectures you stoutly on your iniquity. *Facilis descensus*, he says, sternly, when you wish to make light of your sin; and then he goes on to draw a picture of your future if this kind of thing continues, wherein you see yourself as the shabby clerk where now you are the prosperous partner, your wife keeping a small day-school for the sons of bankrupt tradesmen, and your children put out as drapers' assistants and milliners' girls. You are by no means a professed turfite, and your income is good enough to allow of the loss of half a dozen ponies without feeling it; you make one bet in the year, and only one, and you do not care two straws whether you win or lose; but somehow Odo makes you feel yourself not far from a blackleg; and you leave him in an abject frame of mind, self-condemned beyond the power of rehabilitation.

So it is in everything; and you cannot be offended if he takes gloomy views of your

morality, seeing how unaffectedly anxious he is for your good. Besides, he does not parade his exhortations. He delivers them in private only, so that your pride is not wounded by the presence of a third party. To be sure, he takes care to tell you that he has just been lecturing young Rattletrap for the shameful way in which he is carrying on with Laura Mooney; that he takes to himself the credit of Charles Spanker's conversion from an idle man about town to a steady City merchant; and that it was he who prevented the final separation of Mr. and Mrs. Vespa, and brought them together again when everyone else had failed. Still, you cannot swear that he will tell of you as he has told of them; only, you generally find out that he does, and that in a day or two all your common friends have heard that you lost heavily on the Derby, and that Odo Crossgraine felt himself bound to talk to you very seriously, and to get you to promise that you would discontinue a vice which was leading you and yours to destruction.

I never knew such a universal referee, as well as reformer, as Crossgraine. There is nothing which he has not considered—studied quite deeply, you know—and about which he is not therefore competent to give an opinion.

And he is by no means shy in giving his opinion, especially as it is invariably in opposition. I would have taken a house in Pimlico, but for him. It was a charming house, moderate rent, right aspect, proper size, just the thing for me all round; but Odo stopped me.

‘Pimlico, my boy?’ he said, with his eyebrows lost in the roots of his hair. ‘Bless my soul, what are you thinking of? Pimlico is a swamp, a mere slough floored with a little porous concrete—lets all the damp through; fever, ague, typhus, diphtheria—you’ll never have a clear house if you go there; and at high tide your basement will be under water. No, no! not Pimlico if you have any regard for your health; and dear Maggie requiring a bracing air as she does; how can you?’

Of course this shut me up on the spot, and I lost the house which seemed to have been made for me. The odd thing is, I cannot find any other that would suit of which Crossgraine approves. He has called my attention to one or two, as all that can be desired, hygienically considered; but they might as well be in Timbuctoo for convenience of locality as where they are; and while some are mere nutshells which will not hold half my family, others are barracks where the carpets alone would ruin

me. Those which I would take, if left to myself, he will not hear of; so it seems to me that I shall have to live in lodgings for the natural term of my life, and that in all this wilderness of bricks and mortar which we call London there is not a house wherein I can set my chairs and call it home. I wonder what other people do who live in Pimlico or Bayswater, Hampstead or Brompton? I don't hear of any special disaster happening to them on account of the wrong water company, bad drainage, or 'the clay.' But Odo Crossgraine assures me that some day I will thank him for keeping me back from certain destruction; and that people never know who are their best friends.

If Crossgraine would give his advice only when it is asked, it might perhaps be more valuable; but, as he says he cannot bear to see a fine fellow like myself going to the—he uses a naughty word here—for want of a restraining hand, he makes it his business to give that hand, and to stand in the gap like a Briton. One peculiarity about Crossgraine's advice I ought to mention, which is, that it is very seldom active or positive, it is only negative. He cries out, 'Don't do this,' and 'don't do that;' but he does not say, 'do this instead;' excepting when he

advises things which are utterly impracticable. He is the genius of repression, not of propulsion; which, as it is easy to understand, gives one's life a Sisyphean kind of character, trying, to say the least of it. He never seems to understand one's position or its possibilities. He told me to take a sea voyage to Australia last winter when I had my cough; but as my sole income was dependent on my work, I did not see very well how it was to be managed. He objected strongly to my sending Jackey to Dr. Swisher's at Camberwell, and urged Eton as giving the boy a better start. When I reminded him that I had nine olive branches below Jackey, of whom seven were boys all needing education sooner or later, and that my purse was as slenderly furnished as Shallow's wits, he only shrugged his shoulders, and said resignedly, 'Well, of course you must take your own way. I have merely told you, as a friend, what I consider desirable for the boy, and now I wash my hands of the whole affair.'

And when I gave my consent to my precious Maggie's marriage with Will Hopeful, he came down to my house at Loughton, and spent half a day in showing me my folly, and in prophesying woe to the young lovers. It was not that he had any tangible objection to make, or

anything better to suggest; but it was in his way to oppose, and it was nothing to the purpose that his opposition was both useless and unjust.

I have known Odo Crossgraine for a great many years now; and I am sure I am very fond of him, dear old fellow, for the sake of old times, if nothing else; but I wish he would leave off his odd habit of perpetual objections, and sometimes try to run currie. He sees the seamy side of everything, and is always foretelling disasters, contradicting opinions, opposing designs, and finding out faults. If I hold my own against him he gets huffed and out of temper; if I yield to him he breaks down suddenly midway, and leaves me stranded in the midst of an action which he has proposed, which I have undertaken only in deference to him, and which is utterly uncongenial to my nature and impossible to my powers. It is out of his line to guide or support. All that he can do is to prevent and withstand. He is the opposition; always in opposition; and I think he would die of melancholy if the world came round to his opinion and left him nothing to oppose.

I hear that he is going out to India as the confidential adviser of some Nawab, whose name I dare not attempt to spell. The Nawab will

have a hard time of it ; and if he survives the mentorship of Odo Crossgraine he will have a tougher constitution than falls to the lot of most men—even strong men of the Anglo-Saxon race inured to hard knocks, winter tubbings, and the east wind.

37.

III

THE VESPAS

Do you know the Vespas? They are warm-hearted people and wonderfully loyal friends. Indeed I never knew any people with such an immense idea of the duties of friendship as they have. They take up every one's cause as their own, and are as eager for their friend's honour as if they were personally interested in maintaining his ermine without stain. Between ourselves I think they are just a little too ready to see slights where none were meant, and to make mischief, quite unintentionally, in consequence. They are always telling you that you owe it to yourself to take up this and to resent that; and that you ought to show people you are not to be trifled with, and that you understand your own value and know what is due to you. And the odd part of it is, they quarrel with you themselves if you will not quarrel with others.

Now there was that matter of Tom True-

penny. I do not think he meant to affront me, and I never shall think so; but the Vespas said he did, and that I ought to take it up. Why should I? If he liked to marry secretly, and not tell me for three months after, why should I resent his reticence? He had his reasons; I was sure of that; and so I said; but the Vespas insisted on it that I should cut him dead. Poor dear Tom, whom I loved like my own brother! And when I said 'no,' and stood for his eldest as I had always promised to do, my high-spirited friends cut *me* for a twelvemonth, and told everyone I was such a sneak they really could not countenance me any longer.

If they are not backward in pushing their friends into hot water, the Vespas are always boiling kettles on their own account. They make life a perpetual kind of triangular duel, with a change of combatants as occasion demands; but there is always the duel. You never know who is who with them, for the bosom friends of yesterday will probably be their deadly enemies to-day, and unless you are duly posted you are apt to make awkward mistakes. And they quarrel for such absurd trifles too. If a party is given and they are not invited, there is sure to be a coolness, then a flounce, next a snap, and last a quarrel. If a myoptic friend, or a

preoccupied one, passes them without seeing them, the whole battery of kettles is on the fire together, and the supply of hot water is unlimited. Lord! the turmoil there was last season because the Turner Vanes gave a grand dinner and did not invite the Vespas or myself! They said it was a slight, an insult, a cut direct, and that we must take it up at once. They did not mind so much for themselves, they said, as for me; and in fact they would take it up chiefly on my account, and show the Turner Vanes they would not have a dear friend, as I was, slighted and insulted. Now I did not want to take it up. I hate taking things up—so much better let them alone! I do not expect to be asked every time my friends give dinner parties. Even the Turner Vanes, rich as they are, have but a limited amount of dining-table; and someone must be left out, so why not I as well as another? When I said all this to the Vespas, I thought they would have annihilated me on the spot; and to this day I can see Mrs. Vespa's bright black eyes flash as she tossed her head over her left shoulder, and said to her husband the Major: 'I think, John, we have no further business here.' And they hadn't, for many a day after.

The Vespas are a large family, and scarcely

a month passes without some deadly disagreement among themselves; in which they expect their friends to take part. If they do, they have cause to remember the old proverb about the bark and the tree; for when the family quarrel comes to an end, as it is sure to do sooner or later, both sides fall on any unwary interloper who may have been about, and whether he has trimmed between both, or made himself a partisan of one, his certain doom is sacrifice. He is the victim offered up to the genius of renewed concord, and the whole family can never too loudly reprobate his interference. It is a difficult position for friends; for what can you do when, on some sudden unloosening of those waters of strife of which the Vespas can always command such overwhelming cascades, the Colonel says loftily: 'If you continue on good terms with my cousin the Major, I shall consider it a direct insult to myself; and you know how *I* have always stood by *you*;' and, ten minutes after, the Major, and the Major's wife, simply propound their ultimatum: 'Ourselves or the Colonel; you cannot keep both.'

What are you to do? You like both men as much as you *can* like a Vespa; that is, with an effort to remember their good qualities. You have been on occasionally pleasant terms with both,

if with many frequent skirmishes intervening ; why then should you be dragged by the hair of your head into a dispute which will be smoothed over before a month is out ? You know quite well that the thing has no vitality and as little reason ; and that the only one to suffer in the end will be yourself. But there you are, in a cleft stick ; and your only way of escape is on to one or other of the two horns presented to you. And they are so eager to reckon their partisans that even a sympathetic look, or an attitude of interested attention while they are detailing their wrongs, is taken up and counted for gain ; so if you have sympathetic looks for both, and an attitude of interested attention impartially assumed, you will be set down as a hypocrite and timeserver, deceitful and double-dealing, and you will have both your friends on you at once, claiming you in concert. ‘Did you not say that I had been badly treated ?’ cries one. ‘Did you not agree with me as to the horrible injustice of that person ?’ shouts another. ‘You know you took my part when you called on me,’ says Mrs. Vespa, with the flashing black eyes. ‘What ! do you deny that you confessed your sympathies went with me ?’ scornfully asks another Mrs. Vespa, with a look that withers you as you stand. The saints protect you ! you

are in for it without reprieve when the Vespas quarrel among themselves, and either appeal to you for sympathy during the process, or fling you over when they have made it up!

A family dinner at the Vespas, when they do not think it necessary to put on the curb, is a painful experience enough—none more so. Mr. Vespa snubs Mrs. Vespa, and she snaps him; and they all jangle together with the most profound indifference to your presence. Or, if they remember you, it is only to appeal to you and insist on your giving your verdict, and saying plainly who is right and who is wrong. And they are not to be satisfied with anything but a plumper. You may try and temporise, and weakly endeavour to please both sides, feeling indeed that it is an impertinence on your part to assume the office of judge between them; but the Vespas don't understand shilly-shally they tell you, and half measures do not go down with them.

‘Who is right?’

You might as well take the plunge gallantly, and at first as well as at last; and my advice is—go in for the wife. Always in all conjugal quarrels stick to the wife. In the end she is sure to have her own way; and while she can retain you on her visiting list if you offend the husband, he cannot keep you if you offend her

and she makes up her mind to pitch you out of the house. Besides, it really makes very little difference whose side you take, as a question of justice. They are both so sure to be wrong there is not the thickness of a hair to choose between them ; and they are both so sure to quarrel again, that you will gain at least a certain feeling of stability if you elect under which flag you will always be made uncomfortable and suffer vicariously for offences in which you have had no part. It is as well to understand that friendship with the Vespas means discomfort and dissension, now with others and now with themselves ; and that you might as well attempt to make a vasp's nest into an arm-chair as to keep peaceful days and a cheerful unconcern of trifles, when your warm-hearted but irritable friends take things up, either for you or for themselves.

IV

THE BROTHERS DOWNRIGHT

RUFFE DOWNRIGHT and his brother Plaine are about the most remarkable men of my acquaintance. They are both 'men in their own right,' they say, and owe no allegiance to conventionalities of any kind. Each despises in his own way certain fundamental graces of modern life, and both make it their boast that they do so. Ruffe breaks his lance against the humbug of manners, Plaine couches him against the humbug of opinions; and there are no lengths to which they will not go in their favourite attempts to bring society into the ways of simplicity and truth. Ruffe will go to the finest evening party in a frock coat and muddy boots; I have met him thus scores of times, and I confess, with all my respect for his talents, I have been a little ashamed of him. He asks his friends to dinner, and he gives them, literally, 'a joint and a pudding.'

‘You see I make no fuss with you,’ he says complacently. ‘Simplicity, plenty, and a hearty welcome—that is my motto; and those who do not like my hospitality can stay away.’

We want some one, he argues, to set a good example and discountenance the excessive luxury of the day. So we do; but for all that we do not go out to dine off boiled mutton, or steak and fried onions; and when we give a full-dress party we do not want one of our guests to appear in muddy boots and a frock coat, by way of protest against our own patent leathers and diamond studs. Neither do we want to hear one of our friends boast of doing things out of the line of the rest of our guests; as Ruffe is so fond of doing. For instance, at my house the other night I heard him—in his muddy boots—boast to my Lady Fineairs how he always travels third class, and what an amusing place the knife-board is.

Very true to fact, and honest enough in Ruffe, I dare say; but when I saw the look which Lady Fineairs gave, first to Ruffe and then to myself, I could not help wishing he had kept his experiences to himself. There was no earthly necessity, so far as I could see, to take that most conventional of all women into his confidence on a first introduction. I really do

not think it amused her; while, naturally, she classed me with my friend and measured us together; and I am bound to believe that the result was not satisfactory. For I met her in the Park yesterday, when she evidently would not see me, and I distinctly heard her say to her companion: 'A perfectly impossible set, my dear; no better than so many gorillas!'

It was mortifying, to say the least of it; but when I hinted to Ruffe the price I had had to pay for his 'simplicity,' he laughed till his sides ached, so he said, and told the thing as a good joke everywhere.

'To think of my having frightened my Lady Fineairs by the knife-board!' he said, and laughed again. 'Lord! what fools folks are!'

Granted; but one looks at the folly of mankind a little more leniently, perhaps, when one has to pay the piper for teaching them wisdom, or rather for proving their foolishness to be foolish. Ruffe doesn't think of that. He has no piper to pay, having long ago divested himself of that conventional appendage; but he has no bashfulness about his friends' money-boxes, and the black-mail his iconoclasm levies on them!

Plaine does the same kind of thing in another line. Plaine is irrepressible on the score of

intellectual truth. He is afraid of no conclusions to which his premises may logically lead him, he says ; and no man's prejudices sway or daunt him : which is dignified and courageous for his own part, but embarrassing for his friends.

Plaine is emphatically a free-thinker, and believes in nothing that he cannot prove. You have no objection to his scepticism, so far as your own sense of rightful toleration goes ; but you would rather he did not parade it at all times and seasons as he does. He has more than once done me an ill turn by his intellectual emancipation, and honesty of speech to correspond. I am certain he was the cause of that odd misunderstanding which crept in between young Chasuble, the Bishop's eldest son, and my poor girl. Chasuble and Maria were engaged ; and you may be sure I was glad at the prospect of seeing one of my daughters so comfortably settled. It was a good match in every point of view ; and the child liked him, independently of his prospective shovel hat. Plaine met me in Kensington Gardens, walking with my two turtle-doves ; and greeted me and Maria in his old way of cordial familiarity. He is very cordial in his manners ; has a habit of saying ' dear ' very frequently ; and his voice is loud. He

turned back with us, and showed his footing in my family by the free and easy way in which he spoke to me and the unconventional affectionateness of his tone to Maria. My future son-in-law, who was proud, fastidious, and singularly reserved, not to say cold, in manner, looked on. Plaine turned the conversation on to religion. He always does when a clergyman is present—as his protest. Before we had gone a hundred yards he had launched his whole cargo of negations. A personal Providence, an immortal soul, revealed religion, moral responsibility, a spiritual state, a sacerdotal class—he had demolished them all; but he warmed into almost eloquence on the theory of Force; and when he came to protoplasm and the ‘Descent of Man,’ after Darwin, he was so urgent in the cause that the passers-by stared, while some stood still to listen, as to a street preacher. My future son-in-law heard him to the end in profound silence, not deigning the smallest reply. When he had finished, he coldly and politely wished us good day; and soon after there sprang up something, I cannot tell what—a strange intangible coldness—a queer misunderstanding—that, do what I would, I could never put straight; and in the end the engagement was broken off, and poor Maria had

to be sent to Madeira: whence she never returned.

I found out afterwards that both the Bishop and his son spoke of me as a confirmed infidel, and lamented publicly the lost souls of my family.

Another time I heard Plaine advocating communism to my conservative banker—when I had overdrawn my account. The next day I received a formal note from the bank calling my attention to that fact; with the usual result. But my aunt Honoria's business was worse than this.

I had expectations from my aunt Honoria; and in fact she had more than once distinctly told me that she intended to leave me all she had. She was staying with me one winter; was to have stayed all the winter; would have probably gone on staying to the end of her life. And she paid well. Plaine Downright called one day. He had just been reading somebody's book on Mormonism, and he was full of it. He would talk of it; and all my endeavours to stop him were useless. And he advocated polygamy sturdily. My aunt Honoria sat on the sofa knitting. She was an unmarried lady of about seventy-two or so, who used to boast, with grim emphasis, that no man had ever presumed to make love to *her*. And I fully believe her.

She said very little. She only sat and knitted ; every now and then looking over her spectacles at Plaine, as if he had been a painted savage performing a war dance. Plaine read her face, and became more outrageous in consequence. From polygamy he got on to 'terminable marriages'—marriages contracted without ceremony or obligations, to continue just so long as, and no longer than, the wish of the parties interested ; and when he said this, Aunt Honoria deliberately rose, shook out her skirts and left the room.

She spent that evening in packing, and the next day she left the house ; writing to me immediately on her arrival at my cousin's, declining all further communication with a nephew who could admit into his house such a person as Mr. Plaine Downright. 'If these were my friends,' she said, 'neither I nor they were fit for *her* to know.'

Soon after this she died ; and her will, dated the week after she had listened to Plaine's views on the great marriage question, and had established herself at my cousin's, cut me off with a legacy of five pounds to buy a Mant's Bible—with a prayer that I might thereby have grace to perceive and acknowledge the deadly error of my ways.

Of course I respect Plaine's uncompromising honesty; but I regret his habit of thrusting his opinions on every one's notice as he does. He might just as well keep them to himself unless he is really asked to give them; but to go about, as he does, throwing stones at every one's idols, and hurting all men's consciences because it pleases him to gratify his own, is, I think, a very undesirable, and indeed a very selfish thing to do. Look at the harm he has done me—me whom he calls his friend, and as I have proved myself on more than one occasion when he would have come to grief of no light kind but for my help! Yet he has all but ruined me, I know without intending to hurt me; but just for the gratification of that dreadful 'iconoclasm' of his. Ruffe is bad enough, but Ruffe is more laughed at than condemned; though, to be sure, he lost me Lady Fineairs' friendship. Still that was nothing compared to Plaine, and what *he* has cost me. It seems to me that 'iconoclasts,' however valuable to the community at large, should make so much concession to public opinion as not to volunteer an exhibition of their 'sling and stone' in ordinary drawing-rooms. If they want to testify, let them choose a fitting field where they can hurt no one but their declared and willing adversaries. But it is

rather hard on their friends to be dragged into the fray, whether they like it or not. And to be labelled as belonging to a creed, simply because one's humanity is greater than one's party spirit, and one's heart is wide enough to admit the good of all sorts and conditions of thought, is not a pleasant return for what is substantially the right thing in both manners and morals.

V

THE MUSTELAS

It is a privilege to visit the Mustelas. They understand it so themselves, and make you know that they do. For the Mustelas are people who receive only the absolutely flawless into their acquaintance, and hold no relations with the sinful, the indiscreet, or even the unlucky. Their society, they say, must be pure and not contaminated by the admixture of doubtful elements. Hence, their friendship is, as it were, a seal on the character of anyone they affect; and you are assumed to be 'all right' if you are met at the Mustelas. Patronised by them, no one can possibly object to you; for they are so very particular, they would not countenance you for a moment if you were shaky in any way.

To be sure, odd stories concerning themselves are afloat—stories which I do not like to detail at length; for who can say whether they

are true or not? But what was that about Mustela and the little governess, and Mrs. Mustela's extraordinary complaisance, ever so many years ago? And indeed, did not Mrs. Mustela do something queer on her own account? Did she not run away from school? or deceive her parents about her marriage? or do something hazy, and that will not quite bear the light of day, since her marriage? I have a vague kind of idea that, as all is not gold that glitters in the material world, so all is not so impeccable as it seems in the moral. But all that is past now; and Mrs. Mustela is the rigid demander of absolute faultlessness in her friends, and the rigid denouncer of those famous peaches to which the younger Dumas introduced the world—at five sous each.

In their zeal for moral perfection the Mustelas are perhaps rather too apt to believe evil of others. You see, being so sensitive as they are about straight lines, they are keener sighted than most others in the matter of crookedness. The consequence of which is that, let the most absurd reports be set afloat concerning you, and the Mustelas are the first to look grave and to insist on a full explanation. And as we all know that to live down ill-natured reports by steadfast bearing and a certain lofty ignoring

them is oftentimes better policy than to make a stir about them, and confront and confute them, the Mustelas simply hound you on to your destruction. It may be valiant, but is it wise to take by the horns the raging bull bellowing at you like an angry Jove, yet who is unable to hurt you so long as you keep your own side of the hedge and let him alone? But this is substantially what the Mustelas require you to do, if you are their friend. If any slander is thrown out against you, you must 'meet it;' and call heaven and earth to witness that you are innocent; and demand your slanderer's authority; and set your whole society in a flame; and every tongue wagging; and so dig the thing into people's minds, when, if you had but gone your own way and held your tongue and never minded, it would have passed like yesterday's cloud and been forgotten as soon. Being, however, the friend of the Mustelas, you are bound to leap the fence and take the bull by the horns; and if you do not, they cut you, and tell their friends that they are sure you cannot stand a scrutiny, and that you have certainly done something very shameful which you are aware will be found out if you call attention to yourself on that particular matter.

Once they cut me because I was connected

with a certain publication, the literary tone of which they disliked; and I would not, being bound in honour to silence, disclaim the authorship of one or two specific articles at which they had taken offence. As it happened, I had not written the papers in question; but the credit of them was enough for the Mustelas, and double-locked the house-door against me for many a month. It opened again only when I wrote the play which set all the town agog, and carried my name in blue and green letters a foot high through every railway station in England. And the Mustelas like to have as their friends people whose names are written in blue and green letters a foot high, and placarded against the walls as Celebrities.

This zeal for the absolute purity and impeccability of their friends extends itself to their friends' friends and still more remote relations. You were seen with the Golightlys, were you? The Mustelas wait on you in solemn conclave, and put it to you with affectionate earnestness, how can you expect to know them, the spotless Mustelas, when you know the doubtful Golightlys? They are very sorry, they say, but the man who can be seen with Captain Golightly is not the man with whom they would care to associate; and he who can give his arm to Mrs.

Golightly is not fit to shake hands with their daughters. They feel it incumbent on them to decline all further intercourse with you, unless you will consent to purge your visiting list according to their directions. Some one must keep a high standard they say, and they assume to themselves that lofty office.

I can scarcely reconcile their assumptions with their practice; and when I see them hand in glove with the Honourable Mr. Flashband, I confess I am puzzled, and wonder what they have done with their winnowing machine in this instance, and why they have laid it aside on his behalf. For the Honourable Mr. Flashband is notorious enough in his way—and that way is not a very honourable one. But then he is wealthy; and John Luckless, another of my taboo'd friends—whose feet, by the way, have never strayed so deep into the mire as Flashband's—is poor; and say what we will, money does gild the iniquities of the aristocracy, while poverty and rags make the slips of the vulgar very shameful things! I see them, too, a good deal about with Lady Loosely—a woman I, for one, would not care to know; and I am no prude; but then, to be sure, Lady Loosely is a grand lady, and can introduce them to the best society, for all that she is a painted harri-
dan,

who, but for her title, would be shunned like grim death ; whereas pretty little Mrs. Golightly is socially no better than a nobody, with nothing much worse to be laid to her charge than a flirting manner, and a pair of big black eyes, with which, I confess, she makes too much play. No one has dared even to hint such scandal of the pretty little goose as has been publicly bandied about from club to club of my Lady Loosely ; but the Mustelas draw away their skirts from the contaminating contact of the one, and live in the pocket of the other.

There were never better friends to me than were, at one time, the Mustelas. That was in my palmy days, before I married and came to grief. I can never forget the kindness they showed me then ; the generosity with which they opened their house to me, or the maternal interest Mrs. Mustela used to take in me. They have never been quite cordial to my wife. They say they are disappointed that I did not make a better choice ; and they resent her want of fortune and plain middle-class extraction. And I know they hinted that I had not behaved quite well to Miss Nora, Mustelas' niece, who lived with them in those days ; though I had no more thought of making love to the girl than I had of marrying her maid ; and never spoke half a

dozen words to her that I can remember. When I lost so heavily by the Agra Bank, I was severely exercised by my prosperity-loving friends, who lectured me for a whole afternoon on the sinful folly of holding bank shares—that failed. They did not invite me, I remember, for many months after. As I kept my home and did not come to public grief, they saw I was not so hardly hit as they had feared; and by degrees they relaxed into their old ways. But when John Luckless turned up again, and I befriended him as usual, and burnt my fingers in putting out his fire, they were again very irate; and when I had to let my house and go into a smaller one at the extreme limits of St. John's Wood, they wrote to me, expressing a certain kind of Christian sorrow for my misfortunes. But, feeling it a duty they owed themselves and their children, they said, to keep their society pure, they were, therefore, compelled to renounce my acquaintance. My evident want of a high moral standard in associating with such people as the Golightlys and *that* Mr. Luckless, and my criminal imprudence in speculating beyond my means, had, they confessed it with great reluctance, changed their former good opinion of me; and they were forced to add, with great regret, that I had fallen below their esteem. So that

account was closed; and when I met them in the Park the next day—they cut me.

Lately my wife's godfather died, and left me, most unexpectedly, the whole of his handsome fortune. I met the Mustelas the week after the news got wind. They came up to me more cordially than ever; and Mrs. Mustela said in her maternal voice—she has many voices—that 'really they had felt my estrangement from them so painfully they must put an end to it, and I must positively go to them the same as ever.' Then they asked after my 'dear wife,' and praised her beauty and amiability as vehemently as Amy Silvertongue would have done; and so, left me, overwhelmed with their affectionate warmth. I think, however, I shall not go to their house in spite of their kindness. You see they adopt one only because of one's circumstances, not because of oneself; and though I am by no means so Utopian as to think we can be independent of material conditions, yet I do not care to be accepted or discarded merely because I am prosperous or the reverse; and as it was they themselves who made the coolness between us, I think I will let it stand as it is, and not attempt anything like intimacy again.

VI

JOHN LUCKLESS

TAKE him all round, John Luckless is the most unfortunate fellow in the world. Nothing prospers with him, and Fate seems to have set a cross against every one of his undertakings. He is, of all my friends, the most disastrous and the most lovable. He is always coming to grief somehow, and half the time of all his friends is taken up in trying to pull him through his difficulties. Sometimes he has to be bailed out of the lock-up, because he got into a row by defending a poor woman against a brute of a husband—and defending her a little too vigorously. Sometimes the brokers have to be bought out, because he must needs put his name to a bit of paper for a friend, to find himself left with the liability attached. But whatever it may be, there is always disaster impending. So his friends have to shore up and stave off, else the whole shaky fabric of poor John's fortunes would fall to the ground, and that which

is bad enough now in all conscience be made infinitely worse.

And he has the worst luck of any man I ever knew. Every peccadillo that he has ever committed—things which with other fellows would never have got wind—is known and blazed abroad. It seems as if he lives in a glass house which is the mark for all the stone-throwing of the county. His career is a marvel of misfortune. Everything he touches crumbles under his hand. His shares are bought at a premium and sold at discount. He never yet had a situation that he kept longer than two months; and do what you will to set him on his feet, he is sure to come tumbling to the ground, with his head in the dust, before you have done with him. This is not always by fault; it is chiefly by ill-luck. He is born to misfortunes, he says, as some are born to silver spoons; and he cannot escape his doom.

The most disastrous thing about him is that fringe of hungry hangers-on whom he has not the heart to shake off, and who absolutely eat him up. They are either old friends to whom he feels bound by length of acquaintanceship, relations by blood, or connections by marriage, who, while he has a shilling in his purse, are generously willing to accept sixpence. So that to know John Luckless is to be drafted into an army of

harpies, who suck one's blood and damage one's repute even more than he himself does. And yet in this very fringe, disastrous as it is, lies the secret of his loveliness if also the cause of his bane. The most generous fellow in the world, one cannot but admire his unselfishness even when one deplores its effects—and suffers from them. What can you say to a man who, with a fine flush on his cheek, tells you, with moist eyes and in a husky voice, that, so long as he has a loaf, his cousin Mary Jane shall have her slice—for can he ever forget her kindness to his poor dear wife when she was supposed to be dying? And how can he turn that old father-in-law of his out of doors now, after having kept him all these years? If you hint to him that Mary Jane is a strong, capable woman, able to earn her own loaf, with butter to it, if she would but shake off her sloth and put her shoulder to the wheel with a will—and that his wife's father has sons of his own, far better able to support him than is he, John Luckless—you hurt him, and he complains pathetically that you take advantage of his obligations to you, and—well! he did not expect that *you* would have looked at things in this worldly light! From *you* he had expected sympathy, a higher feeling—and a loan. So you put your hand in your

pocket for the twentieth time ; and for the twentieth time commit an immoral action in the name of virtue. You take from your own and the deserving, that you may support Mary Jane in sloth, relieve old Snail's sons of their obligations, bolster up John himself in a fatal system, and support an army of harpies and a fringe of leeches which it is your duty to discountenance and destroy.

It is almost impossible to do John Luckless any permanent good. No slavish business suits him, for he is a man of a free artistic spirit ; and the pity of it is that every business seems to him more slavish than not. Either the head man in the office is a ruffian—or the kind of work is degrading—or some pressing human duty which he would have been a brute and a snob to have neglected for such a base thing as business took him off one day without leave, and so cost him his place. However it comes about, it is sure to come about somehow, before long ; and the up-shot of one's trouble in getting him into a valuable situation is an ignominious dismissal for some dereliction of duty committed on high ethical principles.

John Luckless is bitten with the mania for speculation. Long years of patient work, of strict economy, and the judicious investment.

of margins, which are the methods whereby others provide good days for themselves, are to him mean-spirited drudgery; consequently, he no sooner gets a few pounds together than he places them all on a bright-looking bubble; and loses to the last farthing. He is as unlucky, too, in his family as in everything else. His wife either fails in health, or goes off with a dragoon, or fulfils the alcoholic destiny of women who want 'tone,' and justify the 'Saturday' and the 'Lancet.' Anyhow, she is no help to him. The children, too—of whom there is a goodly tribe—are sickly, and otherwise unsatisfactory. They have more measles and scarlet fever and whooping cough than anyone else; and one or two of them are 'afflicted;' for John's mantle of misfortune is an heirloom, and has descended on his offspring. Put to school by friendly patrons, they have to come home again before they have been there three months. They cannot bear the work, or the place disagrees with them. Given the means of one profession, and they are sure to develop quite opposite tastes, and either get their indentures cancelled, or, as soon as they are free, render all their previous training of no avail; as, when young John, who had been educated for a solicitor, took to painting as soon as he was out of his time; and Sam, who had been

put to college and was promised a snug little living in Cumberland, 'made tracks' for the Gold Fields, and utilised his classics by anathe-matizing his bad luck in quartz and cradles in limping hexameters.

One of the unfathomable mysteries connected with the family is, how they live at all, pressed up as they are in a small house not half big enough for them and not a quarter furnished. And they are slow in moving off. The persistent ill-luck that has always accompanied them has taken the energy out of them; and when other lads would be out in the world doing for themselves, the Luckless boys are hanging about at home, waiting, like Micawber, for something to turn up. At last they thin themselves out, and then you think, the pressure being lightened, John's sun will shine at last. Not a bit of it. Either his characteristic ill-luck weighs on him more heavily than before, and Fortune is still more cruel than she was; or approaching age has quenched his never too superabundant energy; or probably his children are as unlucky as himself, and so are drains to, not feeders of, his scanty channels. Whatever the cause, the result is invariably the same: John Luckless is still the unresisting victim of a malignant fate; and if you would not see the

man starve before your eyes, you must still subsidise him generously, and still bear your share of his burdens for the sake of Christian charity and Auld Lang Syne.

And your share is a large one. For, what with improvidence and ill-luck, generosity and weakness, the kindly follies of the man and his damaging virtues, his life is one long series of misfortunes, and by consequence his friendship is a disaster to all who undertake it. I know no man so good or so affectionate—or who has done everybody he loves so much harm. To myself he has been a plague-spot from first to last, in means and in repute. The worst social troubles I have ever been in have come to me through sticking to Luckless in some of his catastrophes, whereby I got splashed with the mud with which he had unwittingly covered himself; while as for the money he has cost me—don't let me speak of it! If only it had done good! But the worst of it is, it was just like pouring water on sand. It all sank away, and not even a bit of green-looking weed or lichen sprang up as my reward. And yet I love old John; and nothing shall make me less to him than I have ever been; and between the Mustelas and John—prosperity without heart and misfortune with love—I choose the latter, and stick to my choice.

VII

THE TURNER VANES

No one who knows the Turner Vanes can complain of monotony in their friends. In fact, they are half a dozen people in one, and you never know, when you leave them, in which character you will meet them again. They stick to nothing ; neither to friends nor to principles, neither to places nor to politics ; and if you expect to take them up where you set them down, you will find yourself absurdly mistaken. The absence of a few weeks makes all the difference in the world to them ; and you have to follow them into quite another sphere of thought and feeling from that which they affected when you were last together. Say that you left them High Church, Tory, and exclusive, you find them Broad, Radical, cosmopolitan ; or, perhaps, gone over to the Free Grace Baptists ; or, maybe, migrated to Rome. You left them loose and worldly ; you find them prim

and converted. You remember many a pleasant dance and many a good rubber at guinea points at their house ; and you have heard whispers of Sunday doings with cues and cards which however you do not repeat, being neither ill-natured nor certain. But after the summer's disintegration is at an end, and you all drift back to your places again, you are met with a severe rebuke in which occurs the term ' devil's books,' when you playfully allude to *that* odd trick ; and Mrs. Turner Vane looks as if she would like to annihilate you for your tactless remembrance of former folly connected with the deux-temps and the cotillon.

In the olden times of three months back, Turner himself was a staunch Gladstonian, and went with the Government through thick and thin—even as far as our Ædile. Now he is going to vote for the Conservative candidate in the coming election ; and he says that Disraeli is the only man who can save the country. He once argued in favour of the Irish Church Bill against a whole roomful of infuriated Orangemen—now he swears no blacker deed was ever inscribed on the page of history, and he talks of the cause of religion and humanity as betrayed past redemption by the Act. So you see it is rather difficult to steer correctly by

the Turner Vane chart; and the result for themselves is a wake of mental 'dogs' legs' which look odd enough as one gazes back and takes in the whole course at a glance.

It is the same with their friendships. You never know where to have them. Say that you parted with them for the summer on the best of terms—they full of geniality and kindness—you following suit.

'Come and see us when you come back, old fellow,' says Turner Vane heartily, wringing your hand. 'You know where you can always find a knife and fork.'

'Come and see us as soon as *ever* you come back,' chimes in the flute-like voice of Mrs. Vane, with her most coaxing accent.

And as you leave them you say to yourself that they are the dearest, nicest, frankest people in the world, and your best and truest friends. So you go on your vacation-trip of six weeks, and when you return to work and London you call on them. They are 'Not at home' though you saw Mrs. Turner Vane herself peep over the blind, then suddenly run back to catch the servant at the door; and you distinctly heard her say, 'John, I am not at home to Mr. L.' The next evening you meet them at the Vespas, when they all but cut you.

‘Hallo!’ says Vespa in a loud voice; ‘what’s all this about, old man? Cut? You are surely never going to stand *that*! I tell you what it is—you must take it up, and I’ll back you!’

Perhaps the next time you meet them they are as kind and hearty as they ever were in their warmest days; and the third time they may have frozen again. You can never feel sure beforehand what it will be; and your own manner has no more effect in determining theirs than the rather useless experiment of tickling the back of a tortoise to make him put out his head or draw it in again. If you remonstrate with them, you make them angry, so that they accuse you of fancies; and wanting to quarrel with them; and they suppose that ridiculous Mrs. Vespa has put you up to this; and they cannot submit to be taken to task by you or anybody else; with all the other silly things which people say when they try to shift the burden of their own wrong-doing on to the shoulders of the innocent remonstrant. Or they may be satirical, and ridicule you for your sensitiveness, establishing a raw which they never allow to quite heal again. Or they may fall back on their short-sightedness—they say they are short-sighted, but you sometimes find

they can see farther and clearer than yourself, and that their kind of myopy is of that uncertain character which puzzles the unlearned so much. Or they take their stand on their honesty and sincerity, and ask you pathetically how you could doubt them? Or they fall on your neck with effusive tenderness, crying: 'My dear creature, you never were more mistaken in your life! We are incapable of change—we are *the* constant friends of our circle—what *could* have made us cool? and to you, too, of all people in the world!' And so you go on again with an uneasy sense of having made a fool of yourself; and of course the Turner Vanes did not mean to slight you; and what a sensitive bit of quiver-grass you are!

The Turner Vanes give very pleasant parties at times; very stupid ones at others; but they are difficult people to visit, because you never know what kind of thing it is to which you are invited. I have more than once received a friendly informal note from them asking me to dine there, just to meet a few friends, and I have gone in half undress, and found ten of the twenty guests titled, and the other ten millionaires. And I have received a printed card for an 'At Home,' and have got myself up regardless of expense; when I have

been ushered into the smaller drawing-room where there were two whist-tables and eight fogies playing for silver threepennies. Sometimes they give a really splendid entertainment for half a dozen people ; and sometimes I have dined there with twice that number, and not enough to eat. I have seen twelve well-placed people and eight potatoes ; and I have seen eight nobodies and twelve peaches, when they were four shillings apiece. In their dress, too, it is the same thing. One season Mrs. Turner Vane and the girls go about in hodden grey, till you scarcely know them at a short distance from charity-school girls ; the next they out-shine your neighbour the banker's wife, who seems to exist only for the sake of her toilettes. Sometimes they live as if they had thousands a year to play with ; and the next, for no reason that the world ever knows, they come down to hired cabs and a cadaverous little ' buttons.'

They are always migrating from house to house and district to district ; and they take periodic eclipses abroad when no one knows anything about them, where they have gone, what they are doing, when they are coming back. When they do come back they do it suddenly, with a bound, like harlequin springing through a trap-door, and take up their place

again as if they had never left it ; meeting their latest acquaintances, made just before they left last year, as if they were brothers and sisters—their latest acquaintances having clean forgotten *them* ; or reappearing among their oldest friends with a queer, dazed kind of manner, like owls in the sunshine, as if they were uncertain who they were and how they would be received. For the matter of that, however, you seldom see the same set of people two years together at their house. Apparently they change their friends as they change their clothes ; and without quarrel or annoyance drop in and drop out again, no one understands why. They are wearied of people sooner than any family of my acquaintance ; and they do not seem to understand the meaning of the word stability. They are the embodied types of change and uncertainty ; and to trust to them is to lean on very slender reeds indeed.

Still, they are charming when the glass points to fair, and their friendship while it lasts is infinitely seductive. The only thing to remember with them is that it will not last. Beautiful as sea foam, it is about as unsubstantial and evanescent. A breath may blow it away. A difference of opinion ; your own too strongly expressed, even if coinciding

with theirs ; your friendship with the Mustelas ; your difference with the Vespas ; nay, nothing even so tangible as this—the very fact that you have been friends with them for a period long enough to weary them—breaks up the whole thing ; and when you look for a recurrence of the old affectionate relations, or even for their continuance, you are met suddenly by a blank, and you leap into a hole, whence it is a question of the profoundest uncertainty when, or if ever, you will emerge. Perhaps never : certainly only when your friends have got tired of the estrangement, and wish for your return among them as the latest novelty they can devise.

VIII

THE TRUEPENNIES

THE Truepennies and I have been friends for a great many years now. I say emphatically friends, with the full weight of the word in my mind ; and I mean what I say. I have never had an hour's coolness with them since I first knew them, some twenty years ago ; and I never shall. For I hope I could do nothing so base and bad as would compel them to withdraw their esteem and regard ; and I know that they would not quarrel with me on suspicion or misunderstanding. Indeed, they never do quarrel with people. Not being of that rash kind which swears eternal friendship at a moment's notice, but proving before taking, they know what they are about in their affections. Going softly and by degrees, they do not come to grief as other people do. They never take up with folks merely out of that foolish kind of fancy which has no more roots than a mushroom ; a fancy

born of a pleasing manner and a plaintive smile, and dying almost as soon as born.

And they are friends for all weathers. They are not only pilots for times of fair sailing, nor worshippers of suns rising or at the zenith. They go in for the cloudy days as well, and for the storms, and stand by their friends gallantly whatever befalls. They do not grow cold even under that touchstone, poverty. Yet they are not rash in their generousities. They have kept that poor old John Luckless we know of many a time from the dogs ; but they have not ministered to his improvidence, nor helped him to be absurd in his own expenditure. And though they have not embittered their benevolence by rebuke, nor taken out their percentage in preaching, still they have given that dear old Imprudence good advice which has been of use to him, and they have contrived to help him more substantially than anyone else has done.

The Truepennies are about the most hospitable people I have ever known. This does not mean that they are remarkable for giving grand dinners and costly entertainments, which however come in their turn, as demanded by social exigencies ; but they have a knack of making you feel at home in their house, and that you are not entertained so much as sharing.

If you are sick or sad, you may find a place of refuge and rest with them for as long as you like. They grudge you nothing, not even that participation in their own family life and happiness which the exclusive guard so jealously from the lonely. They are tender to your troubles, though they do not make them worse by dwelling on them to you—flattering your sense of sorrow by way of being sympathetic, as so many do. But you feel and know that you do not weary them when you go with your tale of troubles, and that you may pour out your griefs into their hands, and they will hold them for you, and so far and for the time relieve you of them.

They do not flatter you like Amy Silver-tongue, nor yet find everything you do wrong and bad like Odo Crossgraine. They are naturally disposed to see you in a favourable light, wishful to find their affection for you justified; but if your faults turn up they neither ignore them nor desert you. I do not say that they would not desert you if you were found out in anything very disgraceful. If you committed forgery of a specially bad kind—defrauded the poor, used your power as a trustee for helpless women and children to feather your own nest with their moss, or did anything else that im-

plied selfish baseness and inherent rascality, then I think they would let you depart even without a God-speed. But if your crime was one of sudden temptation, and of weakness rather than wickedness, whatever worldly loss and social shame it involved they would stand by you and do their best by their faithful love to restore you to your own self-esteem. I know they hold it as one of the cardinal points of friendship—to keep with the erring, so as not to add to the degradation which a man or woman, convicted of an offence, must suffer. They say that to spurn a sinner is the way to make him still more a sinner; and that the loving recognition of a friend is the best cleansing agent for one in the mire of disgrace that humanity can grant or receive. Yet they are people of so much strictness of counsel, they never let their love invade their own self-respect. They would not lend themselves to anything crooked or doubtful for your sake. However much they loved you, they would not lie for you; and they would not do anything with the shadow of meanness on it for your good. They would not allow others to attack you undefended, even if you were in the wrong—for there is always a way of putting a wrong truthfully, and yet softening the lines—and they

would sacrifice themselves in comfort and fortune to help you ; but if you asked them to go a step beyond, and into moral mud, you would find you had made a mistake.

This gives their friendship an enormous moral value in the world. People can never sneer at them as being 'tarred with the same stick,' and all that kind of thing, when they keep faithful to friends in disgrace. Every one knows that the Truepennies are as immaculate as the Mustelas themselves ; perhaps more so ; and that fidelity to the faulty does not mean with them likeness in the fault or indifference to its evil. Ah ! many a poor shivering wretch sinking beneath the waves of social disgrace has been caught up by their strong hands and carried triumphantly to land once more. They have pulled more than one through 'the cloud' so many get under ; and I look on them as the very hospital for sick reputations, where many a man and woman, who else would have gone lame and halting through society to the last, has been healed and set firm and square before the world again—his little slip covered up, and his larger lapse boarded round and kept out of public view.

The Truepennies are people of that large, wholesome trust which does not need to be

continually fed by assurances. They believe in you even when they do not see you; and they never quarrel with you on fancied slights and misunderstandings that have no existence save in the brain of the fancier. They are so sure of themselves, they do not need the props which to others are essential. Why should you be cool to them? Why should you no longer care for them? They care for you just as much as they used; they have done nothing to offend you; you have done nothing to offend them; why, then, should there be a misunderstanding? And if there is no reason why, how then can it be at all? So they argue, consciously at times, generally however unconsciously; and the consequence is, they have none of those foolish tiffs and estrangements which embitter one's intercourse with the Vespas and the Mustelas and the Turner Vanes, all on their different grounds; but are emphatically people whom you find exactly where you left, and take up again at the very spot you left off.

They are people who want nothing of you but your love and confidence, and your esteem. And you—unless you are of the Luckless kind, or like another of my friends, of whom I have not spoken, Lachrymosa, who is always in distress of some sort—you want nothing of them

but their love and confidence and esteem. And though they would go very far out of their way to serve you, and you also to serve them—yet it rarely if ever happens that you need do so hence there is a placid pride of equality in your friendship that makes everything easy and delightful.

They do not, however, consider it absolutely necessary to always include their friends in all that goes on in their own lives. Thus, when my old chum and schoolfellow Tom married, I think I told you he did not tell me. And he had his reasons, as I found afterwards. And if they are going to do anything very special and important, the chances are equal whether they take their friends into their confidence or not. It just depends. But if such people as the Vespas fire up and take offence, and talk of being left out in the cold, by which the requirements of friendship have been violated and their mutual good understanding endangered, and all that kind of thing, others, more steadfast and reliable in their own natures, accept the Truepenny action as sure to be right, whatever it is. And they always find in the end that if their friends have been more reticent than usual they have had ample justification.

In fact, the Truepenny family ranks as high

in the moral world as it does in that of helpful, strong, and certain friendship. It is of no use to doubt them. You get nothing by it but your own foolish discomfiture when things resolve themselves. For these wise and self-respecting people do not trip. They have too firm a hand on the rails of both common-sense and morality, and when they say a thing is so and so, we may be sure it is as they say, and that we shall find no flaws by future knowledge. I know no one I love better than the Truepennies. If they do not tickle my fancy they satisfy my heart; if they do not excite my poetic enthusiasm they nourish my very soul; and I ask no better award from fate than the continued affection of my faithful friends, and my own inner consciousness of deserving it.

SOULS IN MUFTI

ALMOST everyone who sees for the first time a great man ; or woman, by your leave ; a person of whom he has heard much and imagined more—a poet, statesman, actor, what not—sees something for the most part exactly opposite to what he had expected. What ! that small, nervous, fair-haired man, who came skipping into the room with no more show of dignity than of savagery, *he* the great editor, the famous leader-writer whose thunder causes monarchs to tremble on their thrones, and whose fiery eloquence shakes empires to their centre?—or is said to do so ; which comes to the same thing. You can scarcely believe it. When you heard his honoured name, you expected to see enter with a kind of restrained majesty, an air of conscious spiritual pomp, a Jovian sort of man—a man in whose flashing eyes you could discern the lightning he knows so well how to wield, and whose soul was as the soul of a

prophet—a man whose smallest sayings you were prepared to gather up with reverent care, like sacramental crumbs or the dust of diamonds, and from whose lips you hoped to learn the fate of nations; and here you have a limber, bounding, india-rubber make of creature who laughs in a falsetto, speaks in a squeak, talks ostentatious nonsense to the prettiest of the silly women present, and says nothing among men more noteworthy than the most unoriginal of sub-editors might have uttered. The political eagle whose daring glance scans the diplomatic heavens, the majestic literary lion whose roar reverberates through Europe is, in the body, nothing more formidable than a playful puppy or a chirping stonechat, and his manly soul is in a mufti so complete you find it difficult to believe it is a disguise at all.

This is one shock to your nerves—one upsetting of your theory of fitness. Another is in that gloomy individual yonder, who sits in a corner and blinks, but who is looked at by all who know him smilingly, as if his very presence was provocative of mirth, and his moping looks were so many capital jokes. He is pointed out to you as the man, who, given a pen in his hand, pours forth wit by the folio, and whose written humour is, as the widow's cruse of oil, an inex-

haustible fund which never decreases nor dries up by any amount of use or length of time. His hard-featured friend now talking to him in a gruff voice, who looks capable of felony and arson, and whose face is as if it had been made out of wood badly hacked with a blunt knife, is the musician whose tender melodies seem to wrap your soul to heaven. That rubicund citizen in a frock-coat and thick boots, in appearance the model father of a family, bald-headed and obese, is the modern Catullus whose book of poems young ladies may not read. That quiet person, scrupulously neat in his attire and noticeably languid in manner, is the stage buffoon whose 'gag' keeps the gallery in a roar, and whose costume is as notorious for its excess as his parts are for their breadth; and next to him is a comely person inclined to be 'many-fleshed,' with close-cut hair thin at the top, a smooth fresh skin, a merry laugh and a roving eye, who is the favourite tragedian of the town. How are your gods destroyed! how are all your ideas of harmony and the fitness of things put to the rout! and how does Nature herself seem to have given herself over to cheatery, and to have entered into a conspiracy for universal human deception!

Nothing is more rare in the world of man

than to find the form and the spirit in accordance, and to meet with souls *not* in mufti. The typical poet or artist with his turn-down collar and long hair floating wildly to the winds, his eyes full of fire and frenzy, seeing things which ordinary mortals do not see, hearing music of the spheres to which our grosser senses are closed, is a pretty fable that every now and then finds an exponent more or less exact to the ideal; but in general our modern poets and artists are very much the same in outward appearance as other folks, clean linen being no longer unknown among them, while tailors and barbers have their will of them as of their less gifted neighbours. And if they, the typical poet and artist, have abandoned their old habit of proclaiming themselves from the outside, to whom else shall we look? And indeed, the fact is as we have said—people are very seldom what they seem to be, or show what they are. As Nature gives mimic forms to helpless creatures to conceal them from their enemies—witness stick and leaf insects, and the like—so the soul seems to save itself from being preyed on by the disguise of a false presentment, and the precaution of going about in mufti. Sometimes the mufti is more beautiful than the soul—sometimes less so; but almost always, like

the lapwing which makes believe to have a broken wing, and cries out in her grievous hurt that she may lead you away from her nest, human nature misleads the observer by showing signs—of what it is not.

Do you see that bright-eyed and demonstrative person—man or woman—a very dashing, jovial, impulsive kind of person—a person with small square teeth shown liberally in a constant smile—with bright eyes capable of flashing pleasantly—with the frankest, blithest, most inconsequent manner—together an artless, self-unconscious-looking person, whose heart is on his or her sleeve for daws to peck at if they come that way? You give your trust to that person; you open your own heart to that great hospitable heart of his or hers; you are free to his freedom, confidential to her expansiveness; you accept the private valuation she puts on herself, and you take him at his own figure: which is a high one. You trust him because he says he is trustworthy; and you let her take possession of you while you seem to be receiving her into your own being, as was once before enacted in that old tale of the wooden horse which entered Troy; and you translate your feelings into deeds, and do as you are bid, and follow as you are led. Who would not, with

such an artless and transparent guide? My dear creature, you were never more mistaken in your life! That impulsive, gushing manner affected by your friend is the result of the calmest and coolest calculation. Every trill of that unctuous voice is studied; the value of each glance of those beaming eyes is known and understood; the backward fling of the head, the very attitude of the hands in that suggestive throw which seems to mean, 'I give'—all is a matter of the most consummate art, and the whole play means hooking you, if you are good for anything when hooked.

Another soul of the same type, with a difference in the mufti, is to be seen in that gay, bright, brilliant creature, who is the light and life of every company in which she finds herself. She is not expansive, though her manners, as mere manners, are free; yet, when you come to think of it, she has told you nothing even in the moment of her most seeming frankness; and when you remember her conversation and get to the spirit of it, as one does by memory after the dazzle of the personality has passed away, you see there was neither heart nor enthusiasm, neither love nor trust in what she said, though she simulated all, and simulated well. Her eyes were watchful while her laugh was loudest, and

she was measuring effects when apparently carried away by her own unreserve. Wearing the disguise of boundless hilarity, she is in essence an *intrigante*—a woman whose life is passed in reducing her world to the state of pawns at chess or fragments of a puzzle manipulated and fitted according to her will; a woman who thinks to play her life's game with more effect by pretending to show her hand when in reality she conceals it, keeping the triumphant deuce lying perdu behind the innocent and dummy knave. Admire her if you like, but be wary in your trust; for all she wants with you is your victimization if it should happen that your victimization would help her; and she verifies that old saying about giving a hair of your head to One who shall be nameless, when he will draw in your whole body after it. Be wary also of that caressing, creeping, feline little lady, who comes stealing up to you with her soft step and purring manner, and nestles herself into your heart and confidence before you know where you are. By the loadstone of her sympathy she draws all your secrets out of you; and you, without knowing in the least how it has been done, find yourself suddenly in the position of a sucked orange or a windbag pierced. You have put the cord round your own neck and yourself

sharpened the knife that will slay you ; for in the end that purring little lady will betray you, never doubt it ; and you will find that those velvet paws of hers have sharp claws within their sheaths, which she knows how to use when occasion and the hour demand. These three are souls of the same kind in essence, wearing different disguises according to temperament ; but the base-line on which each is built is alike in all—and the name of that base-line is Self.

You are one of a dinner party where there are notabilities, certain of whom you desire to know ; and you intimate your wish to your good-natured hostess, and expect a rich fructification of your desire. You are however assigned to a quiet, timid-looking woman whose name you do not catch ; a woman who is badly dressed—what the French call *fagotée* ; who speaks in a low voice and with evident nervousness of manner ; whose eyes are plaintive rather than bright ; whose air is one of diffidence and the consciousness of being sat upon ; and who is not particularly ready or fluent in her talk. You are by no means pleased with your hostess's arrangement, and think she might have done better for you, knowing your wishes. You hold yourself as thrown away, you and your chances—you who are somebody, and your chances of

coalescing with another somebody in a manner right. You resent your assignment to a good honest body, doubtless given to babies and domesticities, as she should be, but a creature who is nobody; who could not be entertaining if she tried, and on whom your brilliant flashes would fall dulled and pale. So you do not waste them, but take mental rest and are surlily stupid—giving the best of yourself to your left-hand neighbour, and treating your charge as in no respect a shining light, nor one to be conciliated or sought to be made way with. In fact, you snub her with more lofty candour than you care to remember afterwards. That woman is a writer, and wields the most trenchant, most unsparing pen of all the tribe. She sees through you at a glance, the plaintive diffidence of her large brown eyes having that power. And when you are airing your pretensions and showing her your contempt she is taking stock of their value, and yours, with a rapidity, a cruel accuracy, that would amaze you were you to see her mental note-book. In her next epic you figure photographed to the life; and you find, when too late, that those large eyes of hers, with their steady, quiet gaze, were just two picklocks which got your soul out of you and examined it all round to make capital for herself by it, and

turned your assumption of superiority and half-concenscending, half-disgusted patronage to her own good account in the future.

A man comes up to you—a man with fair hair, a tender manner, a pretty face. You cannot call him handsome, for he is too small and feminine. He is a soft-looking, girlish kind of man, who gives you the impression of being able to be swayed to the right or the left by anyone who might choose to take the trouble of moving him. The only things, perhaps, that might make you doubt the thoroughness of this apparent tender flexibility are his voice, and his eyes when in repose; the one being thin and acrid, the other hard and fixed. But you must be a keen observer to notice these things; and the majority of people are not keen observers. Save these two indications, that man's mufti is very complete; and when you hear the story of his life you lift up your hands in amazement, and say: 'Who would have believed it!' Inflexible and pitiless, that fair, pretty-faced creature, delighting in long sunny brown locks and a sweet, half-pleading air, will trample on rights and love alike in his ruthless determination to carry out his own iron-bound will. As a politician he is a partisan; as a religionist a bigot; as a scholar he is a pedant; as a husband he is master; and as a father he is

the tyrant of his family ; but as a creature to look at he is feminine, soft, and gentle. Indeed so much so, that the men who do not know him are rather disposed to laugh at him than not ; while the women take to him kindly ; and the stronger among them have quite a maternal and protecting feeling towards the poor dear fellow, and treat him as they would treat a timid boy or a depressed and unassertive woman. All mufti !—that acrid voice, and the eye so hard and fixed when in repose, the sole rents made in the thick disguise in which that by no means pliant soul has clothed itself ! The woman who gives her life and happiness into his keeping will find that she has given herself over to the power of one who will rule her with a rod of iron *not* twined round with roses. So much for a pleading manner and a timid air, in his case also as in others.

A noticeable man is he, that handsome fellow leaning in a sloping, careless way against the doorway between the rooms. He is scrupulously dressed, graceful in bearing, though his grace is somewhat stiffened by haughtiness—and he is as notorious for his pride as for his masculine beauty. He has the air of one who condescends to his company ; and you never see him converse save with the notability of the assembly—the man who is most highly placed,

the prettiest woman, or the richest heiress. You feel his quiet assumption of superiority, which is unmistakable if carefully guarded from being aggressively offensive ; and you wince under it, though you have to submit to it—an airy, unsubstantial insolence as it is, Heaven help you ! That man is the meanest thing out ; and his whole game of life is played with loaded dice. He has no more sense of honour than he has of shame or courage ; and his pride is only a mask which hides his poverty of soul. Gambler and bankrupt, he is familiar with every wretched expedient by which to get the money he squanders on his vices when got—a man who, if you chose to take him by the beard and publicly insult, you might, for all the retaliation he would dare to offer. But his mufti is pride, condescension, unapproachable hauteur ; and his small soul swaggers about in its stately dress, like a hunchback disguised in cloth of gold, whose deformity is not recognisable through the splendour of his garments.

Look over to the sofa where sits that statuesque and pallid person, and watch her speaking with her neighbour. See how calmly she bears herself, how stiffly, how restrained her speech and manner ; but watch her closely—note the quiver of the upper lip ; note the close

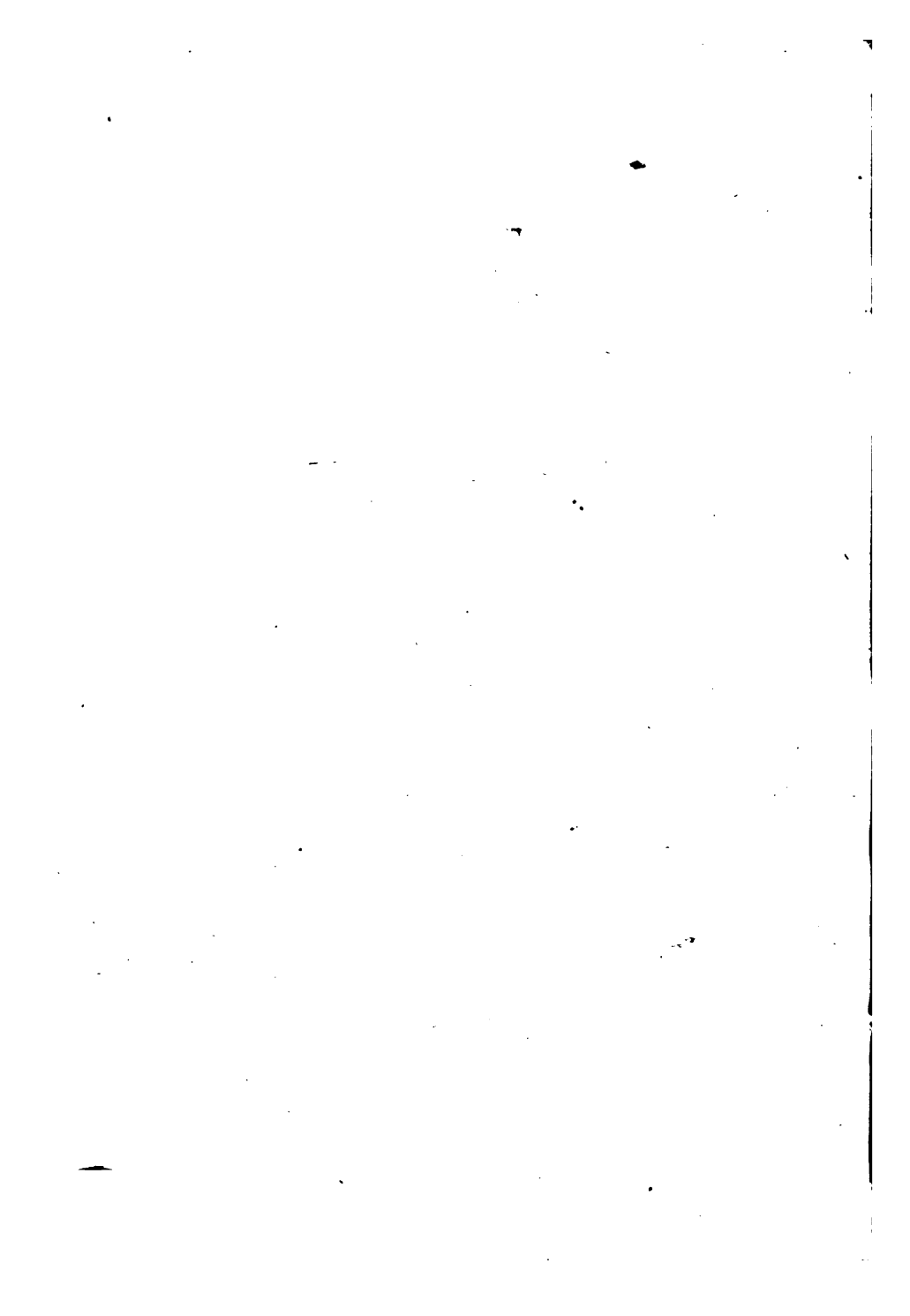
clasp of her fingers, locked within each other ; look at the covert fire of her downcast eyes—eyes which she lowers to hide the fire she cannot quench and must not show. The world calls her cold, uninteresting, perhaps unfeeling ; but her companion to whom she talks—she with the loud voice and the demonstrative manner, whose cheeks are soon flushed, and whose words are torrents of large-limbed epithets—her the world takes as the embodiment of passion and the enthusiastic exponent of a principle. The truth between them is, that the statuesque woman is slowly consuming away for the fever that devours her ; that her love, her passion, her aspirations, are all more than her body can support ; while the rose-red gusher knows nothing superior to her ease, and her large-limbed epithets have no more life in them than those wooden dolls which squeak when judiciously pinched in the middle. The statuesque woman has been brought up in the school of self-suppression, and is moreover shy and nervous by temperament ; the gusher has suffered herself to expand beyond the limits of her nature, and is not afflicted with sensitiveness or spiritual refinement. But the mufti in which both are clothed changes the aspect of each soul ; and people shrink from the one for her coldness, and like

the other for her warmth—or the reverse—reading the case only by the misleading label on the outside, and thinking the appearance goes all through, like a lump of virgin gold.

Those happy folks who make love publicly—after ten years of marriage, too—who bill and coo in quite a charming fashion before an admiring crowd, weep bitter tears in secret over the miserable failure of their life's venture. That rude joker who sets your teeth on edge by his roughness to his wife, making you inclined to strike him, loves her tenderly, and would not hurt her, body or soul, for kingdoms. He is only wanting in tact and refined breeding, not in the honestest, the most devoted love, That shy woman, who blushes and looks at you with bended face, and pretty eyes raised with the most delicious tenderness, is the coldest coquette of her society. She has no pity for anyone—the man she fools or the woman she wrongs—and breaks hearts with no more ruth than children break their toys—human affections indeed being to her mere playthings wherewith to amuse herself in idle moments. That solemn man with the wise eyebrows is a born fool who cannot write good English; that awkward, boyish-looking fellow who stammers is the rising genius of the day; yon dowdy henwife

is the great advocate of woman's rights, and has pluck enough to face a shrieking crowd; that harmless-looking, beardless individual once superintended a massacre; and the laughing, rosy-gilled jester, keeping his own side of the table in a roar, is a judge who this morning put on the black cap and shed tears as he ordered a human being to execution.

So we go on, all of us wearing mufti more or less of excellent device, of beautiful appearance, of efficient disguise; but none of us thoroughly concealed, yet none of us thoroughly transparent. Nature has sent some souls into the world with no more disguise than a gauze scarf across their brows; others are in the closest mufti. But, thin as it may be, there is always the gauze, and shadows and folds make this part dark and that part relatively opaque. No soul that lives stands out without any disguise whatsoever. If it did what would the world be like with the Palace of Truth become a reality, and men and women read like open books? Good for some things, it would be evil for others; and, on the whole, until the time comes when lambs and lions lie down together, we must consent to take the human soul as permanently habited in mufti, and use our wits for the clever penetration of the disguise.



COURTSHIP AND MATRIMONY

WHEN the world was young, and before the mysteries of life were more than mere names, there used to float about the nursery a queer little topsy-turvical picture called 'Courtship and Matrimony.' In 'Courtship' the man and woman were smiling, spruce, delightful. Their eyes were full of fun; their mouths went up at the corners; his tartan cap and her ribbon bows left nothing to be desired; and their nice fat chins were the very sign and seal of honest pleasure and content. Turn the picture upside down, there was 'Matrimony,' with every line reversed and every circumstance travestied. The eyes were angry, and the corners of the mouth came down with snarls and big words written clearly on the soured lips. The man's tartan cap, which was so smart as a head-covering, became a frouzy-looking necktie; and the woman's ribbon bows, which seemed to nod sympathetically with the quips and cranks of the old gallant

opposite, now did duty as crooked and untidy fastenings of a handkerchief—answering to the savage neglect of the man's tie. The 'smiling ray' of courtship had become the quarrelsome and angry lightning-flash of dissension. The wine had turned to vinegar; pepper had been mixed with the sugar; the honey had become corrupted: and poor frightened, shivering little Love had flown out of the window as surely as if the grim wolf of poverty had entered in by the door. This was the lesson of the future set before the children, to whom the conditions were as vague as death itself; but they enjoyed the queer thaumaturgy of the picture, and did not worry their callow brains as to its practical application.

A great deal has been written of late about marriage, with all its pains and penalties, its disappointments, disillusion, uncomfortable crosses, and monotony of 'everlasting part-ridge.' By the way, these mourners or accusers—as it may happen according to temperament—never remember that there are such things as duties; that engagements voluntarily undertaken should be maintained if possible, and that responsibilities, once assumed, should be fulfilled also if possible. But these duties are prosaic things at the best; and the 'divine dis-

content' of a wounded spirit has such a poetic side to it, and can be treated with such breadth as well as tenderness! Edwin, moodily gnawing his moustache and thinking life not worth living because Angelina has grown fat and lumpy, while Lucile is as graceful as a young palm tree; Angelina, laying in bronchitis by gazing at the moon and stars when she ought to be getting into bed, the while weeping over Edwin's prosaic bluntness, and Captain Lovelace's music and eyes and poetry and voice; these are themes on which a deft literary hand can embroider endless variations, all tending to sympathy with Edwin and pity for Angelina. But no one would be brutal enough to tell Edwin that he was a weak-minded noodle, or to sniff at Angelina as a little fool whose duty it was to mend her husband's socks and see that he had a good dinner when he came home, and not to cry to the moon and stars, and maunder about Captain Lovelace and his cheap sentimentalism. That would be a vulgar way of looking at life—a rough-handed treatment of its tenderest strings—and all the prophets of the new high-falutin' school would turn against and rend such a prosaic earthworm with his coarse and common doctrine of duty, patience, acceptance, and making the best of it!

Making the best of it is just what this new school will not do. Because by time, hard use, and neglect, the gloss wears off the velvet surface and the burnish of the silver gets dulled and tarnished, there must be a new manufacture and a new mint altogether. No one thinks of a little gentle brushing, and a careful rubbing up with plate-powder and washleather. Because the conditions of matrimony overlap and finally drive out those of courtship, husbands and wives feel aggrieved, and the world is to be turned topsy-turvy because the flower and the fruit are not identical. The charm of courtship is its mystery, its uncertainty, its sweetness of seeming, its greater sweetness still of granting. In those divine ethereal days, when a look suffices for the happiness of a week, and the faint fleeting pressure of four taper fingers and a thumb opens the very gates of Paradise, there is no possibility of regret, no foothold for ill-temper. As birds put on their gayest plumage and find their loveliest notes in the courting season of their lives, so do men and women put on their sweetest moral characteristics, and find their loveliest potentialities of sacrifice, unselfishness, devotion. He is all chivalry and deference; she is all dignity and womanly self-respect. Or his strength of manhood makes him her pro-

tector and her guardian, so much on the defensive for her that he is aggressive to all others; while her sweeter quality of submission accepts this attitude from him as her due and his duty—and the chord is one of unbroken harmony throughout.

The security, the familiarity, the closer acquaintance of marriage, reveal depths which have been concealed, and turn the seamy sides to the light. His deference becomes weakness; her dignity is but the silver veil to conceal her arbitrariness. She will be mistress, and he, poor weak-kneed, weak-willed creature, from a loyal servitor sinks down into the position of a grumbling slave. Or, his manliness of protection broadens out into brutality of coercion, and her submission of acceptance slops over into indolence, idleness, and general good-for-nothingness in the home.

It is all very sad, but what is to be done? We never love the real person, but always a figment of our own brain—the ideal created by fancy and passion combined. When the glamour is gone, and the unbeautiful truth stands confessed, we have committed ourselves to the service of the false god we ourselves created, and we cannot draw back. We married in faith and ignorance, and we cannot unmarry

after proof and knowledge. There are certain things which, when done, can never be undone. When we have cut down a tree we cannot glue it together again. When we have built a ship and manned and loaded and victualled her, we cannot send her crew adrift, sink her cargo, and break her up for matchwood because we do not like the run of her lines—now that we see her more clearly—or because she rolls more than she ought, and pitches unpleasantly in a heavy sea. We must be bound by our own actions; and marriage is no exception to the rule.

Of course, there is a great deal of unhappiness in marriage. How should there not be with the thousand difficulties which beset human life? Irritable nerves consequent on the overstrain of modern existence—disgust for tameness, for monotony, consequent on the frantic excitement and unrest of our habits—the discontent of insatiable ambition—the selfishness engendered by love of pleasure and craving for luxury—all these help to make marriage a boredom rather than a rest, and the family a hindrance, a nuisance, a millstone rather than a duty, a joy, and a well-beloved tie. Then, as soon as the shoe pinches, there is a frantic howl of pain, and all the limping wayfarers with sore

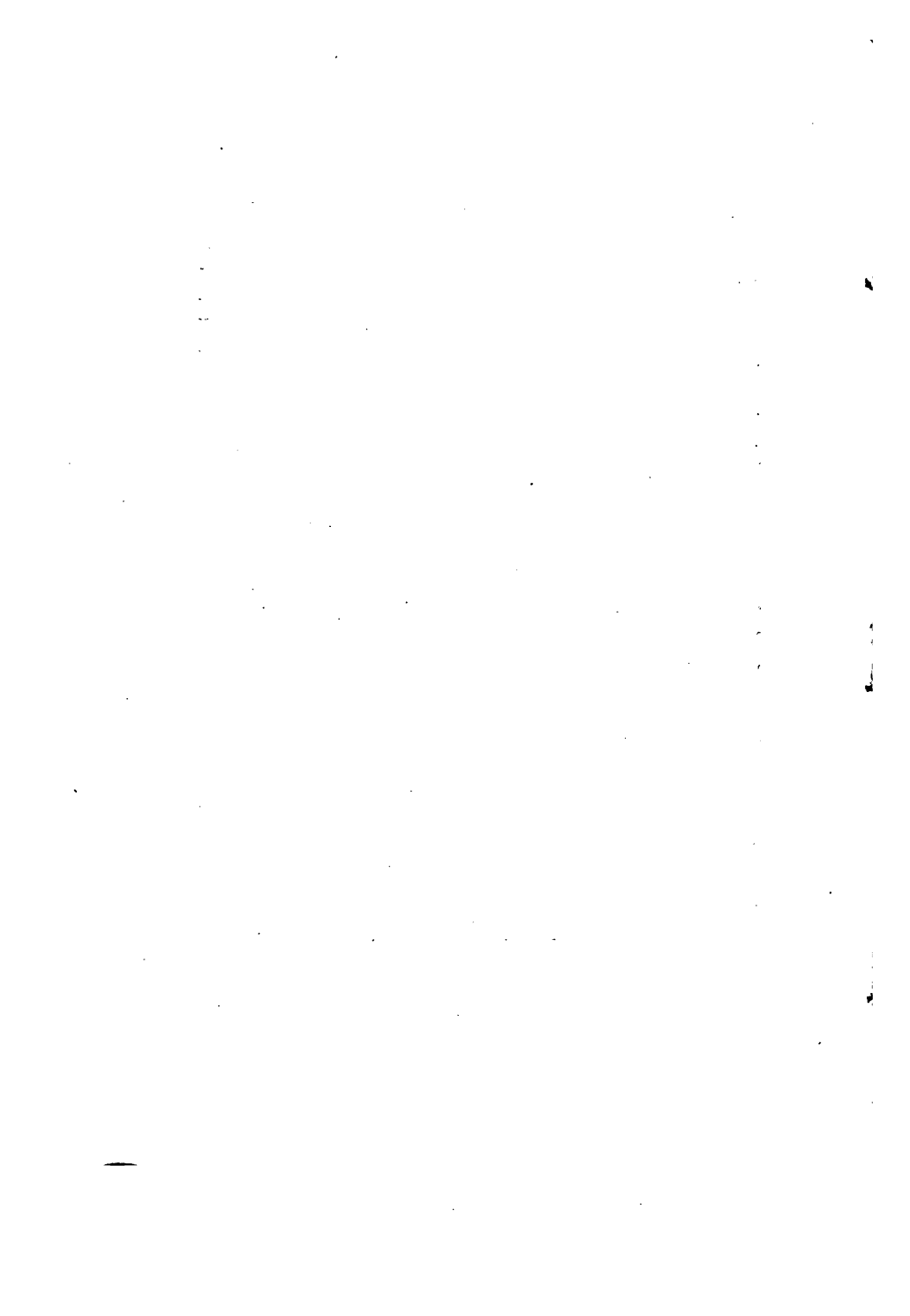
feet join in the outcry, till the world rings with the groans of those who insisted on being shod with these special shoes—perhaps against the advice of the far-seeing and the warnings of common-sense and experience. Nothing will satisfy these limping howlers but the right of kicking off their shoes altogether. No anodyne will do—no remedies are listened to. To one who hops woefully on hard peas the advice to boil them down to softness—boil them by patience, consideration, tact, what not—is scouted as an insult to suffering. It is all wrong from first to last, and the only remedy is to cancel the bargain, shuffle out of the obligation, and dive down into the great matrimonial mart for a new venture as often as this last has proved a misfit. What is to become of the family? The dignity of woman, the solidity of society, the purity of national morals, are questions that do not trouble these heated advocates for radical reconstruction. They only know that they are miserable, and that they want to be made happy; and what else may go by the board does not count.

They want to be made happy. In that phrase lies the whole meaning of this late outcry against the continuity of the marriage tie—the gist of this wild demand for facility of

divorce and free trade in lawful spouses. It is essentially the cry of moral indolence and confessed inability to exercise self-control, or to manipulate circumstances by the shaping power of the will and intellect. Suppose, instead of this absorption of all the energies in discontent, some were applied to the active 'betterment' of things as they are and must be: would not that be more to the advantage both of society and the individual? Suppose some of the care and grace of the gala courting-days was carried into the working-world of marriage, and husbands and wives kept up the sweet illusions of courtesy and consideration, affection and unselfishness, which made them so delightful when sweethearts only: would not that be a lovelier poem than could ever be written across a bill of divorcement?

What are we that we should be unable to shape our own lives? Our own actions determine our fate, and our ship sails according to the lines we ourselves laid down. We laugh at the old fable about the carter and Hercules, and we say 'good' to the advice given by the god in the clouds to the prostrate and inactive lout on the earth. Where is the difference between muscles and morals?—our cart and our happiness?—the rut of the seamed earth or the

groove made by temper, impatience, and selfishness? If we will, we can put our own shoulder to the wheel without going to the god of the Divorce Court. A little self-restraint, a little thought for others, a little common-sense in not expecting too much, and some endeavour to give even more than we receive—all this would help, rather than loosening the pegs and letting the canvas of the matrimonial tent flutter up to the clouds. And even when things are really too cross to be ever put straight, there is always the dignity of silence to be observed. If we do kick off our shoes we need not call the whole world to witness the process, nor howl so that all the little dogs within hearing echo the cry till it becomes a deafening screech. Human nature has its limits, and roasting at a slow fire is not being pelted with rose-leaves. But there have been martyrs who bore the roasting in faithful silence, and endured with heroic constancy what they could not cure by active self-defence. And the breed ought not to be extinct now. Nor is it.



STORIES

MY FIRST SOIRÉE

I AM a young housekeeper of large ideas, married to a quiet man of small means. I have extensive notions of how things ought to be done, and I endeavour to carry them out with refinement and economy combined. But it is rather difficult to keep to that happy ideal when dragged first to one side and then to the other—now by my husband's limited balance, and now by my own unlimited aspirations. Struggling always between these two opposite poles, my life has a certain uncomfortable misfit about it—a want of harmony between desires and attainments that strikes one as disagreeably as a velvet dress trimmed with imitation lace, or a homely carmelite bedecked with gold and silver tags.

I have been married now about two years. This is not a comfortable period. It is just long

enough to see the lover break to pieces on the sandbar of marriage, but not long enough for the building up of the friend out of the wreck. I have begun to reason on my husband's character—never a wise thing for a wife to do—to weigh his imperfections, to criticise his good qualities, to penetrate the meaning of his actions—in a word, to understand him; and I do not think that husbands gain by being understood. But then perhaps I am prejudiced in favour of romance, and am more fretful and exacting than I ought to be. Jonathan—Jonathan is my husband—says I am.

Married two years, as I have said, and we had never yet given a party!—when one day, three weeks since, my husband proposed to me, quite of his own accord, that we should invite a few friends to tea—just a few, and without ceremony—as we had been out a good deal lately and had given no kind of return.

‘How many do you think of, Jonathan?’ I asked, taking out my tablets, which I always carried in my pocket. Jonathan gave them to me before we married; and my naughty baby *would* play with them the other day, and broke one of the leaves. Jonathan was so angry about it!

‘Oh, just one or two, Totty! The A——s;

and the B——s ; old C——, perhaps ; and the D——s too, if you like.'

'And the E——s,' I said. 'We went to them, if you remember, last Christmas ;—we must have them in return.'

'Very well, as you wish it ; and I should like to show the F——s a little attention as well. But, remember, Totty, I want only a very few, and no fuss or ostentation.'

It was all very well for Jonathan to say this ; but I should like to know where we were to draw the line ? and whom we were to leave out ? and if we asked all that we ought to ask, and so made a large party of it as we ought to do, how could we possibly give only beef and bread ? as he said, in his slow, stupid way. But men are so stupid ! They never see things in a rational light ! However, Jonathan had done it himself, and had only himself to blame when he came home that night, and I showed him my list of a hundred and forty—each of whom it was absolutely imperative on us to invite, either as an acknowledgment of kindness shown to ourselves ; or because of the wisdom of conciliating influential friends for dear baby's sake ; or from the principle of mere ornamentation, and the advantage of good names and smart toilettes in a drawing-room of no pretensions.

Whatever the reason, there was the necessity; one hundred and forty to be invited, not one of whom could possibly be knocked off the list.

Jonathan was very savage when I read the names over to him. 'What could I mean by such absurdity?' he said. 'Did I want to ruin him outright? A hundred and forty people, indeed! How could all, or half of them, cram into our small rooms? and what were they to do when they had crammed in? That was always the way! If ever he proposed anything quiet and rational and inexpensive I must break it up with my absurd notions of gentility and cost, and either make the whole thing impossible, or to be attained at too great a sacrifice.'

And so he went on scolding for half an hour—I saying nothing, but drawing spider-legs from every name, till the tablets looked tattooed. At last, when he had finished—for even a husband's lecture must come to an end some time—I said, very quietly: 'Well, now that you have done, will you kindly look over this list with me, and tell me who are to be left out?'

He did not like being spoken to so coolly, but he could not find fault with me because I kept my temper when he lost his; so he took the tablets from my hand, and began checking off the names, one by one, as he spelt them out.

Of course we had a little quarrelling over some of them; for all that he particularly disliked I particularly desired should be asked, and all that he cared most for I thought of least importance. This is generally the way with husbands and wives—is it not? I do not mention it as anything extraordinary. After we had fought about fifty battles in this manner, ending always by retaining the name in question as indispensable, Jonathan's patience gave way; I knew it would; besides, his smoking time had come.

‘There, do as you like!’ he cried, ungraciously flinging the tablets into my lap. ‘I wash my hands of the whole affair, and will take neither interest nor responsibility in it. I am very sorry that I said a word about it. I meant a quiet little friendly evening of one or two only, and you have swelled it up into a monstrous party, as you always do. So now you may manage it for yourself. It is your own affair, not mine!’

And then he stalked away to the door and I began to cry. But, as he did not look back—and, indeed, he would not have cared for my tears if he had; he was far too cross—after a little time I thought it wiser to leave off and begin my calculations for supper; for *now* I was determined

on my party, and determined, too, to have it my own way.

The next day I really set to work. First there were the printed invitations to get, with envelopes to match; and this was the beginning of my troubles, for I could not find any in our whole neighbourhood of the pattern I wanted. I remembered a certain form which Lady Twoshoes always used, and I was determined I would have this, or none. I cannot describe to you half the difficulties I encountered. I think I must have walked between twenty and thirty miles looking for this form, which at last I found in an obscure printer's in the City—the only house in London where it was to be had, and which was, in point of fact, the source of supply to my Lady Twoshoes' own stationer's. I was not a little proud of this triumph of energy, as you may suppose, and ordered my four quires with the feelings of a successful general; but when they came home—which they did by post—they were not quite what I expected. They were very dirty—all the outside leaves unusable by reason of grimy thumb-marks; and the string, which had been tied too tightly round them, had cut into some and marked all. Besides, they were a shilling a quire more than the ordinary forms; the man

making that addition as his commentary on my violent exclamation of pleasure when I found them, and the frankness with which I told him I had searched all over London for them in vain, and would have given anything in the world for that one special form of invitation, which no one but my Lady Twoshoes ever used. I had lost a great deal of time in this search—so much that, instead of giving a three weeks' invitation, as I had intended, I was obliged to cut it down to a fortnight and two days, which was a bad augury to start with; for, as we were going to give a party, I wanted it thoroughly well done, and without flaw or blemish anywhere. However, I was obliged to put up with this small mortification, and issued my hundred and forty invitations with a proud heart if a beating one.

I expected all the answers in twenty-four hours at the very least; but by the end of three days I had received only five—five of the least important; and then came three, conditional and doubtful; and then one refusal; and then another acceptance. So slowly they all came in, that it was not till the very morning of the day that I received the last. Fancy my feelings, being kept in suspense for a fortnight and two days as to the number of guests to come, and

consequently to provide for, both in seats and supper! I do think that people should reply to invitations more promptly. I am sure I always do, for mamma taught me that it was a point of good-breeding to do so; but people are so odd and uncouth nowadays! And all this time Jonathan was so sulky there was hardly any living with him, and he would neither talk of the evening nor help me in the least. I had never seen him so cross since I married; and he has a temper, too, and not always under control.

Well! I had at first resolved that the evening should not cost above five pounds. I had made the most minute calculations with my cook Betsy, and we both came to the conclusion that five pounds would see us safely and handsomely through the undertaking. She was to cook the supper; we were to have the greengrocer's boy to help the housemaid, and a little girl to wash up; and then the greengrocer himself, in a nice new suit, would come and open the door and hand the refreshments; for I was not going to do the thing shabbily, and have only my stupid women to wait; and altogether I thought we should get through famously. But at the eleventh hour—I mean the day before—Betsy lost her nerve, and threw up her place

and the supper in a breath. My friend the greengrocer, I found out afterwards, had frightened her. He had a sister, a cook out of place, whom he wanted engaged for the job, which I was obliged to do, giving her ten shillings for the day's work.

The greengrocer's sister was a woman of as large ideas as my own—larger, indeed, for she scouted my programme as utterly inadequate, and silenced me with a word when I attempted to interpose a faint caution as to the need of economy. 'She knew her business,' she said loftily; 'and as she was responsible for the supper she must be allowed to do it in her own way.'

I had nothing for it, then, but to submit, privately beseeching Betsy to be as careful of matters as possible; but Betsy was a weak-minded girl who always gave in to everybody; so that I was quite convinced I had no back-ground in her, and that the greengrocer's sister might ruin us if she liked. But in the ruin surely the supper would be perfect!

The evening came, and the rooms really looked very pretty. I had spent a good deal of the allotted five pounds on flowers; but then flowers are as indispensable to the success of an evening as lights and cakes; and it was the

supper, not the adjuncts, that I had limited to that small sum, which now I began to think ridiculous and impossible;—the greengrocer's sister told me I might be thankful if I did it under twenty. I had a pretty new dress for the occasion, blue and white, and really I believe that I looked very well; but Jonathan, who was awfully cross, told me I looked worse than I had ever done before, and that my dress—especially my head, of which I was immensely proud—was a perfect ridicule—pronounced in the French manner, which I thought more ridiculous than my bright-blue pompon. So that did not raise my spirits to begin with; neither did the successive arrival of the families of my two grandest lions, without the lions, help to their exaltation. Still, I bore up against the feeling—terribly increasing both in depth and intensity—that the thing was destined to be a failure, and resolved to do my best to make it yet a success. But something stronger than my will fought against me that night; and my poor party was doomed.

We had asked everyone we knew, so the consequence was that all sorts of wrong people jostled each other. People who had publicly insulted each other met, hot and flurried, at the doorway; people who had cut each other stood

face to face, not a couple of inches apart; people with a life-feud between them stretched out their hands at the same moment to the same common friend. One lady, whom I wished to conciliate most of all who came, was 'talked at' by a gentleman in a loud voice—loud enough for all the room to hear; another was ridiculed to her face, poor thing! (Well! her head-dress was very odd, certainly—a Madame de Pompadour kind of thing, with a tower of pearls and horse-hair behind). A gentleman to whom I was under life-long obligations—one of my dearest friends, indeed—stood at my back for five minutes, while I was using my best energies to fascinate a man I had never seen before, and by whose intrigues and unaccountable enmity my friend had been turned out of a lucrative post somewhere. And I, who did not know one hundredth part of the secret histories enacting before me, made matters ten times worse by the way in which I blundered into all manner of difficulties, and brought in contact all sorts of explosive materials; so that, from the very beginning of the evening, there was discord and disunion. And how could one silly little woman set all these grave disasters straight? Then there were the quiet and un-talkative people who would not 'circulate,' but who sat in corners, and on the benches by the

doors, expecting others to find them out, and who were particularly ill-used when they were left alone for five minutes, looking reproachfully at me. As if I was to blame for all the stupid isolation they gave themselves! And there were the people of forward manners and very rusty 'small change,' who talked to everyone and said nothing worth hearing, thrusting themselves into every animated group and dividing couples less animated, but perhaps more interested—interfering without adding and only irritating, not amusing. And there were the deaf people, who had to be screamed at; and the low-voiced people, who could scarcely speak above a whisper—and these two always came together. So that what with mental unfitness and personal disharmony I had a troublesome time of it to put things into even the semblance of working order.

Jonathan was worse than unhelpful in these straits. He had attended to nothing all throughout, having, as I have said, lost his temper from the beginning, only finding the most fault where I had taken extra pains to put things nice; but now he made everything worse by his strange conduct. Of course, if we had committed the blunder of asking incongruities together, we must make the best of it, and not show that we

knew or suspected anything, and certainly not take sides. The merest good-breeding and sacredness of hospitality demanded *that*. But my husband did not think so, and from the first ranged himself as a partisan, paying all manner of attention to some people while entirely neglecting the rest. Consequently I had the sole care of the obnoxious ones, which forced me also to assume the attitude of a partisan. This I told him when they had all gone; but he only said I talked nonsense, and used too fine phrases. He is so rude when he is in a bad humour!

But nothing of this was eternal; and there would soon be the supper to cheer us all up, and re-arrange the spirits of the company. Our rooms were far too small to enable us to do anything all this time; we had a little music, certainly, but only one or two waltzes and polkas by young ladies, dreadfully shy, so that this part of the programme counted for nothing. It was getting near to supper-time now—eleven o'clock, so I thought I would just quietly vanish down stairs, and see how my greengrocer's sister was progressing. I had seen enough to be aware that something was not quite right with that individual before tea-time even, but I was far from suspecting the truth. I went down, then, expecting to find all done, save, perhaps, the last

little ornaments, which belong to the mistress ; but this is what I found instead ; and when you have read it, picture my feelings as the commentary. The exhibition vase of flowers, which I had taken a world of pains with, wreathing the long slender stem with maidenhair, just like those on the stand in the International, was smashed to pieces ; and such of the flowers as were saved had been thrust pell-mell into a celery-glass which Jonathan had in his bachelor days. And we all know that the arrangement of flowers is everything, making them either graceful adornments or vulgar encumbrances. Then there was the trifle-bowl, hired for the occasion—cost price two pounds sixteen—broken right across, and tied with string, with the wine oozing steadily through the crack and dripping in heavy drops on the cloth below. Jellies were shaking themselves to pieces on the table—some, indeed, were wandering over the sides of the dishes and quivering, like transparent dice, on the cloth. A few—very few—shapes of cream and blanc-mange, flattened and broken, were returning to their original liquidity—not one of them retaining any completeness or beauty. Just one plateful of sandwiches had been cut, with all the potted meat and ham left out. The lobster-salad was mixed and messed as if it had been

already rifled and the best parts picked out. There were no forks, spoons, glasses, nor plates at hand—a trayful had just been let fall, and I picked up the fragments of no fewer than three plates—hired—on the dining-room floor. The lemonade, which was to have been superb and iced, according to a new recipe, was sour, full of pips, and as warm as boiling water could make it. The claret-cup—my great point of pride—was ruined in the preparation, and the borage had been stuck in with its heels in the air. The lamp was smoking—it was a camphine lamp, so I need say no more; while Betsy was standing, limp and helpless by the door, in tears; the greengrocer was speaking very thick; and the greengrocer's sister was lying incapable across the kitchen dresser, with the fragments of my ruined supper about her. There was no help for it now:—the thing was a failure—a confessed, irrevocable, unconcealed failure!

I went upstairs in undisguised tears, and whispered the news to a few intimate friends, who good-naturedly enough made the best of it, but who could not give me back my supper; nor prevent those who were not my friends from laughing at me; nor make less than a quarter of what would have been a well-conditioned

table do for a party of a hundred and ten; nor yet pay the terrible bills which poured in on us the next week. Bills—oh, such bills! bills for cream and eggs and butter enough to have fed a garrison, all swamped into a few liquefying creams and a battered old blancmange!—bills for broken glass and china enough to have re-furnished my china closet—bills for flowers, bills for wines, for lemons and oranges, for lobsters and groceries—bills for every conceivable thing and every inconceivable—bills that straitened us for weeks and months after; and all for what?—a gigantic failure! But Jonathan said: ‘it was all my fault, and it served me right; what business had I to attempt more than I could do or had means for? That the thing was a failure was plain enough to the meanest understanding; and though he felt for me a little, yet he was glad of it, for the useful lesson he hoped it would be to me in the future. When I could accept the fact that a poor man’s wife might still be a gentlewoman, though she entertained her friends without ostentation, and gave a quiet little tea-drinking instead of a monstrous, ill-done parade like this, I should be a better and a happier woman; but while I was vulgar enough to attempt things beyond my means I should never succeed as a hostess,

and would always expose myself to mortification and defeat.'

I wonder if Jonathan is right? Perhaps he is, after all! Perhaps simplicity and true hospitality are the best tests of refinement, and these grand attempts with hungry purses in the background are follies and vulgarities too; and inevitable failures with all who make them. I think I shall kiss Jonathan when he comes home to-night, and tell him that I have been a sad little goose, and that I am very sorry I did not take his advice from the first. Poor Jonathan! he is very good on the whole; and, who knows? he may be a better judge than I about some things in life! But what would dear mamma say if she heard me?

CHARLOTTE BRIGGS,
née MANDEVILLE MONTGOMERY.

'FAITHFUL AND TRUE'

PART I

It was an ideal day for a picnic—warm but not sultry, bright but not glaring, breezy and not windy; the very day of all the three hundred and sixty-five for the prize *fête* of the season. Charley Dunn said that he had 'ordered it expressly for the occasion, having spoken to his friend the clerk of the weather up there;' an announcement which was received with a burst of laughter, as that very foolish announcement always is, as if something witty had been said. But then Charley Dunn was privileged—a 'chartered libertine' he used to call himself, spreading out his arms for butterfly wings; and it was one of the canons of the society in which he lived to believe in his wit, and accept his sayings as of the finest quality of humour. He was, in fact, the crowned Punch of the Brough Bridge community; though, to do him justice, his bâton

was made only of pasteboard and hurt no one's knuckles. And as he wore his pinchbeck gracefully, and gave himself no airs of sovereignty, society felt no special call to drop the tinsel into the smelting-pot for the purpose of testing the residuum of gold at the bottom. Thus when he talked nonsense about the weather to-day, and laid himself out to do his part of the general entertainment with more than ordinary energy, everyone was open-mouthed with anticipation, and perfectly sure that the sunshine and Charley Dunn could ‘ beat even fate and the enemy,’ whatever that might mean.

They made a pleasant party on the whole, though there was the usual admixture of the ‘ doubtful element ’—the old maids, starched matrons, and stiff-backed ‘ propriety men,’ who have always to be asked on such occasions, and who are always so frightfully sure to come. There was, first, the little group of confessed aristocrats, the first-class people of the place, headed by old Lady Scratchley, third cousin to a duke, and widow of a ruined baronet, but who might have been own sister to the queen, and the deposed occupant of a principality, for the amount of condescension and fallen grandeur that she displayed. And by her side, as polite and courtly as though she

were a lady of the bedchamber doing homage to a sovereign (this was to show the second class what Court manners and the aristocracy were like), was Miss Le Jeune, of the good old county family—unhappily, now a little decayed and no longer possessing the original seat. She was a lady of a certain age, with a high nose, thin lips, and straight eyebrows, who laid immeasurable stress on blood and had a lofty contempt for 'mere money'—money got by trade being her especial aversion. With her was tall and slender auburn-haired Miss Turnbull, her niece, 'whose father was unfortunately only a younger son, but a man of family and quite thoroughbred;' that meaning, if translated into the vernacular, 'as poor as a rat, and too proud and lazy to work.' Wherefore, on the strength of her gentlehood, Annie Turnbull went about the world with her head tossed up to the clouds; though, to be sure, the blue forget-me-nots in her bonnet were of the 'poorest style of artificial flower known,' as Lady Scratchley's confidential maid remarked, just a trifle disdainfully. But then she had good blood in her veins, which everyone has not, and so had a right to toss up her head, and look for a Prince Florimel at the very least. Also, in the same group stood Miss Grandville,

a deceased dean's daughter, who talked ecclesiastical architecture, and took it as a personal affront if anyone expressed Low Church opinions in her presence—a handsome young woman, but stiff and reserved, fraternising only with the Le Jeune, and even that not too cordially. The flowery-wigged old lady was too light-minded for her, and exacted too much subserviency; and Miss Grandville felt it due to herself, as the representative of the ecclesiastical power, to stand on her rights, and demand respect from the secular power rather than pay it. For which reason she and my Lady Scratchley were generally at arm's length, and hated one another heartily.

The gentlemen flanking this little coterie were Admiral Price, a monkey-faced old sailor with not too many brains; Whiting Fox, the retired diplomatist, and his son, young Mr. Whiting Fox, down from the Home Office on his leave; Colonel Badger and Captain Turbotte: all of them, save the young Home Office Adonis, elderly, unmarried (bachelors or widowers), and ineligible. Close to this small knot of exclusives stood the three Miss Globbs and their four brothers; a tall, large-limbed, well-developed family, with loud voices, a clear enunciation, and decided leanings to the mus-

cular side of Christian living. They were more than a little fast, these young people; but good-hearted enough, and with no very dangerous propensities; still, there the taint was; and though they were general favourites, it was under protest, and 'what a pity it is' always added to their names. But as no one could deny their good-nature, or the inherent innocence of their natures, they came at last to be as well known for 'chartered libertinism' as Charley Dunn himself, and with as complete immunity from untoward consequences. They always had a long following of penniless cornets and young collegians not yet come to their estates, and not likely to do so;—charming men, but not of the marrying order. Party givers who knew them took care to leave a tolerable margin for contingencies; so that, when they came to-day, accompanied by four or five 'useful men,' it was only what was expected, and no one was surprised.

Then there was Miss Moss, the Oriental-looking belle of Cheltenham for a season, to whom tradition and ill-natured gossip assigned an earlier patronymic than that which she bore now—and her brother, young Abraham Moss, if anything more decidedly Oriental than herself. And these two young people were the

cleverest and most entertaining of the company. And there were the two Miss Hawtreys from London, who played and sang themselves into society everywhere, but whose parents and kinsfolk were mythical and of quite unknown condition ; and pretty, affected, sentimental Mary Dowthwaite ; and bluff Margaret Wood—her friends called her Maggie, and a few Maggie Lauder—who spoke her mind to everyone, and did not in the least care whose toes she trod on. There were several more—young men of varying fortunes and very varying features—young ladies of less distinctly-marked individuality—some strangers whom no one of the old set knew, and who did not know each other ;—and then there were the staid married couples of a certain age to give sanction and consistency to the whole.

‘ Must have veal pies and legs of lamb before we come to the sweets ! ’ said Charley Dunn in an apologetic kind of way, defending his administration to the young ladies. Among these staid folk were Mr. Samuel Harmer Hunter, the giver of the picnic, now standing near Mr. and Mrs. St. John, little Georgie Fenton’s half-sister and her husband. And then there was little Georgie herself ; and her papa’s private secretary, young Mr. Roger Lewin.

Mrs. St. John, a black-eyed, sharp-faced little woman, was many years older than little Georgie—old enough indeed to have been her mother, though she would have been very much disgusted had anyone said so in her hearing, being of those who are jealous of the revelations of time, and who insist on juvenility to the last day of their lives. And being so much older, it was but natural that she should exercise a maternal kind of control over her young sister, whose mother had died when the little one was born, poor thing! though, as Georgie used to say with tears in her pretty eyes, and some show of reason, 'she need not be always so cross, and treat me so like a naughty child. I am nineteen now, and surely ought to know how to behave!'

This was in reference to Mrs. St. John's expression of grave displeasure—excited even to that point of wrath which culminated in boxing her young sister's ears—when she found her in the great drawing-room playing chess alone with Mr. Roger Lewin, 'only a private secretary' if you will, but a dangerous young man enough in the eyes of an elder sister careful about settlements, and inimical to portionless love.

..... Mrs. St. John had no very strict acquaint-

ance with love in any of its aspects, being one of the hard sort, as her maid used to say, with no sympathies or affections that had not a substantial bearing. She was an energetic little busybody who must interfere in everyone's concerns, but never to good or kindness; a conceited, sharp-tempered, restless, and essentially vulgar woman—her very manners, indeed, being not of the smooth and undulating character belonging to her order, but spiky where they were not angular. She was very worldly withal, and anxious that no one connected with her should walk in any path, social or spiritual, of which she had not first set the boundaries and trodden down the causeway. Her present great object was to marry sister Georgie to Mr. Samuel Harmer Hunter, a well-conditioned, not ill-looking, and very wealthy iron merchant from the Black Country—a little older than Georgie, certainly (he was fifty-one last birthday), but still a fine figure of a man, and bearing his years bravely. Besides, 'it is better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave,' was Mrs. St. John's perpetual commentary, when that obstructive clause was mentioned as a thing material to the question. Nothing was wanting for the consummation of her wishes but the young lady's own consent,

and this she refused to give ;—though her sister talked to her by the hour together, and Mr. St. John clinched her every argument with : ' Just so, Georgie ; do as your sister tells you ; '—and though sleepy, irascible, weak-minded old papa lent his influence, too, to the same side (when daughter Carry was by), telling Georgie that she might ' go farther and fare worse,' and sometimes advising her, for him, quite strenuously ; but promising, being a kind-hearted old man, if passionate, and very fond of his young daughter, that he would not force her if she did not consent of her own free will. And that was quite as much grace as little Georgie could expect.

Thus matters stood when Charley Dunn persuaded Mr. Samuel Harmer, Hunter to give a picnic to all the gentry round about Brough Bridge, as the best means of making himself popular ; which, as a new-comer, who had made his money in trade, he found some difficulty in perfecting. For the Brough Bridge people prided themselves on their gentility ; and even the very poorest of its admirals and colonels and withered ' scions of nobility,' as platform orators call them, publicly disdained the pretensions to equality of a retired iron merchant from the Black Country, however rich he was ;

though, to do them justice, all the mothers with single daughters, and all the single daughters themselves, made up their private blandishments for what was wanting in cordial social recognition ; and everyone knew that their disdain was a mere pretence, and that each and all abandoned their order when that order was out of sight. Like the augurs of Rome, they could scarcely look into each other’s faces with gravity, when the ‘ disabilities ’ of Mr. Hunter were discussed over their meagre teas—exclusive, if meagre.

Mr. Hunter being a reticent, self-sustained, rather thick-skinned man, cared little for all this. He knew quite well what time and money do in the long run ; so he bided his time, spent his money, and left the issue to the kindly dews and genial rains ever favouring the good seed. The sequel proved his wisdom. When he and Charley Dunn (Charley was his right-hand man) sent out their invitations to a grand picnic to be held at Harrowfield-side, every person in the place accepted : and the muster on the Oaks lawn, where they all assembled before starting, numbered seventy-five and a half, Charley counting old Trouncer, the Newfoundland, as the half. Seventy-five, including not only the *élite* of Brough Bridge and its neighbourhood, but also many of the ‘ second class ’—those

dwellers on the debatable land of gentility, always to be found in a community. And to have floated these down was even a greater triumph than to have flung himself on to the crest of the wave. If Georgie Fenton would have only said 'Yes,' Mr. Hunter's cup of pride and happiness would have been filled to the brim.

It was not only the retired iron merchant who thought the young daughter of the retired banker, in her fresh light muslin and coquettish hat, the prettiest girl, and the most charming, of the assembly. Many others shared his opinion. Charley Dunn himself, though by no means apt to be 'spooney' on any girl, and more inclined to adore all than to love one—even he was a trifle troubled by her—just a shade more serious towards her than towards the rest. And if he had had twopence-halfpenny a year, he used to say—'unfortunately, he had only twopence-farthing'—he might have felt inclined to commit himself to matrimony and misery for the rest of his life. But besides these two, and the half-dozen unattached, putting out their feelers everywhere, like shrimps or sea-anemones for unknown food, there was Roger Lewin, to whom Miss Fenton (*he* was obliged to be respectful, being only the private

secretary) was simply the realisation of his womanly ideal, and the one sole beloved of his life. If Georgie thought the same of him for her own part, it was no wonder ; for he was a handsome young fellow to look at, and of a fine and noble character—steadfast, unselfish, generous, and reliable—stern to men and loving to women, as all women desire their hero should be ; and one whose word, and power of endurance—that patience of courage—could be trusted to any extent. He was a man with whom women instinctively felt ‘ safe ; ’ which adjective expresses all that they most love and revere.

All being assembled then on the lawn, the question now was, how should they go to Harrowfield-side ? and, who should take whom ? Charley Dunn, who knew the unrecorded wishes of half the young men and of all the girls, mated and marshalled them to the best of his power and the plasticity of circumstance ; putting himself to unheard-of straits in his endeavour to please everybody, wherein he generally succeeded. However, ill or well, he did it, which was something accomplished : packing them up in separate parcels according to such pleasant admixture as he deemed best for the society at large, as well as for the service of the individual. And now there

remained only Miss Le Jeune and Miss Annie—who, because they were well born, were very careful of their company and inexorable on the score of chaperonage—the St. Johns and little Georgie, Mr. Hunter, Roger Lewin, and himself:—eight people, four and four, to share in a phaeton and a dog-cart. It was Mr. Hunter's design that the St. Johns and the Le Jeunes should go in the phaeton, driven by Charley Dunn or Roger Lewin, both of whom were good whips, and that he would drive Miss Georgiana over in the dog-cart; an arrangement to which Charley, for his part, had consented with a good grace, thinking it only fair that the host should do what he liked best for himself, and that if he 'chose to tool over Miss Little-one Pretty-one, why shouldn't he? He paid his money and he took his choice—and he was a lucky dog that he had money to pay, and a clever one for the choice he made.' Charley did not go on to say that he, and half a score more, would have chosen the very same thing. He had tact enough to keep that to himself. So the last party stood on the lawn in the sunlight, waiting for the final arrangements; and of the four men standing there, three were in love with the same woman—and one was beloved.

And now a new complication arose. Annie

and Miss Le Jeune, seeing the turn things were taking, warmly protested against the arrangement proposed. They would have neither Charley nor Roger for the charioteer of their precious lives. The one was so flighty—they called him mercurial, which had a grander sound—he would miss the right turning, or upset them in the ditch, or turn them out over the hedge; the other was better certainly, but he was, not experienced enough—the horses would run away, or they would come down, or they would have a fit, or faint, said Miss Annie pathetically; horses did faint very often in the hot weather, poor things! or they would break their knees or something; and Mr. Roger Lewin, though a charming young man, would not know what to do if there was an accident. And accidents so easily happen, you know, without blame to anyone. So they set themselves in decided opposition, and talked and coaxed and insisted till they finally carried their point, and Mr. Hunter found himself obliged to yield to instances which had at least this flattering assurance, that both ladies thought him sufficiently worthy to be trusted with valuable cargo.

Mrs. St. John took no part in the discussion; neither did little Georgie; unless, indeed, that might be called taking a part which was simply

looking up at Roger Lewin once, and saying in a low voice, 'You drive me,' as they stood a little apart—she digging round holes in the lawn with her parasol, and he arranging the lash of a whip which he held in his hand. But when the pretty arguing had ceased, and Mr. Hunter had yielded, saying with a blank face: 'I think the arrangement a very good one;'—then, said Mrs. St. John: 'We four ladies in the phaeton, and Mr. Hunter and Mr. St. John on the box. Mr. Lewin and Mr. Dunn can break each other's necks in the dog-cart.' Mr. Hunter's face brightened. He would have rubbed his hands had he dared. As it was, he gave a small unmelodious chuckle, and clumsily rubbed his chin.

'Oh, no, Carry!' said Georgie hastily. 'I want to go in the dog-cart. I hate sitting with my back to the horses—you know I do.'

'You shall sit on the box, then, with Mr. Hunter, and St. John shall come inside,' suggested Mrs. St. John amiably.

Miss Le Jeune and Miss Annie looked at each other, and a smile, not at all of the kind poets call honied, crisped up their lips like vinegar.

'Rather an extraordinary place for a young lady, is it not?' said Miss Le Jeune coldly.

‘ Oh ! in the country one doesn’t mind a little relaxing of the reins,’ said Mrs. St. John philosophically.

‘ I can drive Miss Fenton over in the dog-cart,’ then said Roger Lewin, coming forward with his cheery air, as if he had been the possessor of half a million, and was not ‘ only the private secretary, my dear.’ ‘ Mr. Dunn can sit behind and keep guard ; and you know,’ he added, smiling and tossing up his bright brown hair with a very pardonable affectation of modesty, ‘ I am not a very despicable whip—at least not for one horse.’ (He was the best in the whole country side.) ‘ Don’t you think my plan the best, Mr. Hunter?’ he continued. ‘ It disposes of a great many difficulties.’

‘ By far the best,’ said Miss Le Jeune quite warmly.

‘ So nice for Miss Fenton in the dog-cart!’ said Miss Annie as if she envied her.

‘ Absurd ! impracticable!’ exclaimed Mrs. St. John in her high voice ; and : ‘ I confess I had not contemplated this arrangement,’ chimed in Mr. Hunter, speaking slowly and evidently displeased.

‘ What would Miss Georgie herself like?’ said Charley good-naturedly. He was always thoughtful of her, and put her pleasures beyond

and above most social laws, and then he hated a fuss, and dreaded 'hitches' in a day's enjoyment. 'That shall decide it, Hunter, shall it not? We are all arguing as to the custody of Miss Georgie, without giving her a voice in the matter; and I call that shabby!'

'If it is left to me, I should prefer to go in the dog-cart with Mr. Dunn and Mr. Lewin,' said Georgie hastily, but with a deep blush.

Mr. Hunter bowed, rallying himself so far as to say, a little grumpily, though he did his best to make it graceful: 'You are the queen, Miss Fenton, and have only to command your worshippers.'

And again Miss Le Jeune and Miss Annie looked at each other, and smiled crisply.

'Your father shall hear of this, Miss,' whispered Mrs. St. John, grasping her arm as she passed so savagely that the red marks could be seen quite plainly through the muslin. But Georgie was too happy to be resentful. She was young and in love, and the present moment was her all, and the future might never come. So she took no notice of the spiteful pinch, but only answered coaxingly: 'Don't be angry, Carry, dear,' as she jumped into the dog-cart briskly. And then the most radiant and innocently loving little face in the world turned like

a sunbeam upon the heavier party in the phaeton, and a shower of smiles and nods and hand-wavings followed them so long as they were in sight, as they rattled off into the summer lane of trees and wild flowers.

‘ She will be obliged to me, at all events, for yielding to her wishes,’ said Mr. Hunter in a musing way to Mr. St. John on the box beside him. (Miss Annie had put in a faint claim for the place, but Mrs. St. John had out-manceuvred *her*, without leaving her a chance.) Mr. St. John held his peace—he could have said too much.

‘ Thank you, Roger, dear Roger ! ’ said little Georgie simply, laying her hand on his arm as they drove off—the phaeton was now out of sight.

Roger Lewin looked at her as she said this. It was a look of such infinite tenderness and a man’s intensity of love, that Charley Dunn, who just then turned round on the back seat to speak to them, comprehended the situation in an instant, and knew the secret which had been kept so religiously between them for six weeks or more.

‘ By Jove ! ’ said Charley to himself ; and he turned quite cold for a moment : ‘ this is awkward.’

‘ What else could I have done ? ’ said Roger to her softly. ‘ It was a bold thing to brave

your sister so openly, but it had to come. It has to come in real earnest, you know, Georgie dearest, sooner or later, if we would be true or happy.'

'Yes, but still it was so good of you!' repeated Georgie fervently. 'For I know that you felt for me more than for yourself, and that it was to release and please me you came forward and upset them all.'

'And not to please myself at all?' returned Roger, with a lover's smile. 'I am afraid I am not quite so unselfish, little darling, as you would make me out; and if I thought of your pleasure a little, I thought a great deal of my own.'

'Oh! that is the old argument, you naughty boy!' said Georgie, laughing and blushing.

'Which one? we have so many! The argument as to which loves the other best, or who will hold out the longest?'

She did not answer this, but looked up at him shyly, and yet with so much frankness in her love, if with maiden bashfulness in the expression of it, that it needed all Roger's self-command not to put his arm round her waist and kiss her in the face of the sun and Charley. Why should he not? he thought. She was his, so far as love and plighted troth could make

her; why should he not confess the love she had given him, and claim both recognition and fulfilment? But wiser counsels prevailed, and Roger did nothing of so expressive a nature that it could never be glossed over again. He only took her small and pleasant hand, and pressed it against his heart.

The drive was very delightful, at least to two out of the three—for Charley had not much share in the fun, as he phrased it. Knowing what was expected of him he discreetly kept his eyes and his tongue to himself—too well versed in the art and mystery of his normal character, that of ‘ playing gooseberry,’ not to be aware that, before they had driven half a mile, if he would only efface himself they would have forgotten his very existence in the fulness of their content. As it proved. Wrapped up in the imperious selfishness of love, they passed the blooming summer hours in the heaven of young lovers; and when they drove up to Harrowfield-side, where every one was waiting for them, were ready to swear that they had not been half an hour on the road, though the heavy old phaeton and its sullen discontented freight had been there more than that time before them. They came, strengthened for anything that might happen—strengthened for Mrs. St. John’s

angry eyes, for Miss Annie's unpleasant smile, and Miss Le Jeune's disagreeable insinuations; strengthened for even Mr. Hunter's very natural self-repayment in the instant possession which he took of little Georgie, evidently intending to appropriate her (if he could) for the whole of the day after; strengthened for open war and for secret plots, by one of the longest spells of uninterrupted intercourse, and one of the most thoroughly confidential talks they had ever had together. If Georgie Fenton and Roger Lewin were in love with each other when the sun rose to-day, what could it be called now? As Georgie said afterwards, in her simple way: 'I felt that I was married to him, and that it would be a crime, and impossible, ever to break it off.'

The picnic was a success. Charley Dunn had sworn it, striking palms with Miss Louisa Globb, who bet him a shagreen cigar-case against a dog-headed riding-whip, that it would 'hitch somewhere—picnics always did;' and though he was taken aback by the discovery he had made, and dismayed at the idea of the 'mess little Miss had got herself into,' yet he shook himself free from all embarrassing reflections when the time for action came, and exerted himself, as usual, to put the whole thing on castors, as the French say.

The day was fine, which was one essential secured ; and there were enough and to spare of partners and comrades. Young people paired themselves according to fancy, and wandered away together with that pretence of unconsciousness we all know of ; and their elders agglomerated themselves into groups, and fed each other with flattery or gossip, as the taste of the majority went. Mrs. St. John made profuse demonstrations to Lady Scratchley, who disliked her to almost plebeian vehemence, and thought her 'low,' wherein her ladyship was not so far out ; and Miss Grandville and Miss Le Jeune stood on the outskirts of the party, criticising the young ladies of the assembly, and, strangely enough, finding none of them all pretty or well dressed, amiable or well-mannered. But then they were both ladies of immense refinement, and had high ideals. The monkey-faced admiral singled out Maggie Wood, because she was as bluff as himself ; and the two made no end of amusement for all within earshot of their rough play. The Miss Globbs, and their brothers, and their useful men, multiplied themselves, like so many Vishnus, and formed concentric circles of laughter everywhere—being poor, this was their manner of paying for their entertainment by society. The

two Miss Hawtreys sang their last new songs to the accompaniment of the guitar which one carried, and of the concertina of which the other was the social 'professor.' Miss Moss was superb, haughty, and a little insolent in her cleverness; and pretty Mary Dowthwaite looked languishingly at young Abraham, on his side not backward to attract as many languishing looks as good fortune and the young ladies would throw in his way. In short, the whole scene was one of bright colours, animated faces, picturesque groups, and universal jollity, as the company dispersed among the trees of the field-side copse, or sat on the fresh dry grass of the meadows, or perched themselves up on the tall banks—all enjoying themselves to the utmost of their natural ability on this warm, sunshiny, glorious summer day.

Mr. Hunter was kind in his way to all. He was a little heavy, perhaps, and he was utterly bankrupt in the small change of conversation; but meaning to be kind goes a long way. He did his arbitrary, clumsy best to keep Georgie tacked to his arm all the day; and she, partly for gratitude and partly for fear of observation, let herself be led captive until dinner-time; but then she slipped her leash, and managed in the simplest and yet the cleverest way in the world to get a

seat next to Roger Lewin, far away from both host and elder sister ; and when dinner was over, she made her escape into the wood : whether alone or not no one ever knew. But the latter half of the day was passed without her sweet face among the players at croquet and Aunt Sally ; and it was only when evening and mustering time came, that she reappeared—no one quite knew when, or how, or whence—her hands full of wild flowers, her eyes full of love, and her heart so full of happiness, she scarce knew how to hold it without letting it run out for all the world to see. A short time after Roger Lewin joined the group where she was ; and he, too, came in the same apparitional way, looking, as Mary Dowthwaite said softly : ‘ as if he had met an angel in the wood.’

‘ Like Balaam’s beast,’ said young Abraham Moss, who did not like him.

So Mr. Samuel Harmer Hunter’s grand *coup* went off to perfection. There was an immense amount of laughing and almost as much flirting ; some friendships were struck up—some, too, were finally disintegrated and sent crumbling to chaos ; and some pleasanter bonds, and stricter, were just begun in the weaving. Much more that was charming if less than intense, was the order and result of the day’s experience. And when

they all separated after a delicious dance and a first-rate supper at the Oaks—Mr. Hunter's place—everyone agreed that it was the most delightful thing ever given at Brough Bridge—that Mr. Hunter's popularity was assured, and the fact of his being a retired iron merchant was condoned and done with.

But there is always a *mauvais quart d'heure* after every joy; the bill that must be paid when the cakes have been eaten and the wine has been drunk; and this quarter of an hour had to come to Roger and Georgie. Mrs. St. John had left them rope enough for the hanging. All the day after the first brush about the carriages she had purposely ignored the existence of either sister or secretary. Her sharp eyes, and hers alone, had detected little Georgie stealing off into the wood where Roger Lewin had sauntered not so long before—and she had held her peace. Nay, she had even seen Georgie's fresh muslin whisking through briars and brambles, in the endeavour to find a lonely place where Love might take his ease and not need Caution to stand sentinel against intruders—and still she had held her peace. But when they all reached home, then the storm burst forth; and fat, lazy, irascible old papa lost a night's rest for trouble at the ill news his 'daughter St. John'

brought him. He was a proud man, though a vacillating and a weak, and had no intention of allowing his prize child to fling herself away on a young fellow like Roger Lewin—a mere nobody, all very well in his way, but with only character and good looks for his fortune. And that didn’t seem quite enough to the old banker, used to deal with tens and hundreds of thousands. So the next morning the young secretary was sent for, betimes, into the library, and shown his bill—the cost of yesterday’s confirmation of his love.

‘ So, young man ! ’ cried Mr. Fenton, pushing his spectacles up over his forehead and looking at Roger with as much disdain as anger ; ‘ a pretty use you have made of your time, I hear ; and a fine return for all my kindness to you ! ’

‘ I am sorry, sir, that you have heard anything unfavourable of me,’ answered Roger quietly.

‘ Unfavourable ? Oh ! you call it unfavourable, do you ? Well done, Mr. Roger ! You can be mealy-mouthed to yourself, I see, however bold in action. Disgraceful, sir ; dishonourable ; unmanly ; that’s what *I* call it ! Unfavourable, indeed ! I like that ! ’

Roger flushed. ‘ May I know the conduct to which you apply these terms, Mr. Fenton ? ’

he then said. 'They are hard words for a man to hear unconnected with any definite fact.'

'Come, come, Mr. Roger! this kind of bravado will not do for me! You know well enough what I mean; and to affect this simpering ignorance is only to add hypocrisy to dishonour. Yes, sir; hypocrisy to dishonour—I repeat it. What is all this I hear of you and my daughter, Miss Fenton, eh, sir? Answer me that, I say!' striking the table with his fist.

'I do not know what you have heard, Mr. Fenton,' answered Roger, raising his eyes full to the old man's. 'I only know what I have to tell; I love your daughter, and she loves me; beyond this, I have nothing to confess.'

Mr. Fenton's puffy face changed curiously during his secretary's audacious speech.

'You love my daughter, and she loves you! Oh! that's it, is it?' he said, after a pause, speaking in a slow, deliberate way, quite different from his former petulance. 'Well, then, let us argue the matter coolly, Mr. Roger. There is nothing like coolness and Cocker. I suppose you have not rushed into solemn responsibilities without consideration? If you have induced my daughter to love you, you must have some plans for the future; marriage, I should suppose, and a home, and all that? What, now, have you

got to offer her?' he went on to say, crossing his legs; 'what is your fortune? and what settlements will you make on her? I am not hard, you see, or unreasonable, and can discuss the matter calmly.'

'I can make no settlements, and I have no assured fortune. I have only my love, my brains, and my hands,' answered Roger a little grandly.

'Poor pay, young man! poor pay! I doubt the pot boiling over *that* fire.'

'With love and courage, it is not such a very bad prospect!' returned Roger smiling, encouraged by Mr. Fenton's manner. Love is so credulous of good!

'Love and a fiddlestick's end!' roared Georgie's father, blazing out again. 'Don't talk your absurd sentimentalities to me, sir! There's no rational business in them! I ask you again, what do you mean to do for my daughter?'

'Work to maintain her; as you worked, dear sir, when you were young, and married Mrs. St. John's mother.'

'Now look, Master Roger,' said Mr. Fenton, uncrossing his legs and speaking not unkindly—for he really liked the lad, and was almost as sorry as he was angry at the whole affair—'this kind of folly must come to an end. You must

see for yourself that it has no root, no foundation, no possibility of future life in it. Give it up, boy, as a dream—very natural, perhaps, to your age and inexperience—but as a dream that must be shaken off. I trust your word so thoroughly, that if you will now promise me on your honour as a gentleman, to have done with this folly, I will overlook the past, and we will go on again as before. Give me your word, Roger, and let the thing stand by.'

'Thank you, sir; I feel all your kindness, and understand it to the utmost,' answered Roger; 'but I cannot give up your daughter's love, or her promise. So long as she remains true to me, I will remain true to her—and after. I cannot give her up, save at her own desire.'

'Then we must part, Mr. Lewin; we must part,' said Mr. Fenton testily.

Roger turned pale. 'I cannot remonstrate, Mr. Fenton,' he said sadly; 'you are in your right here, and I have but to obey.'

'I am sorry for it, Roger, very sorry; very sorry indeed to lose you, because I really like you, and, until now, have respected you; and you just suit me. But I cannot keep a young man about me who makes love to my daughter, and wants to marry her on nothing a year. You have been a fool, my boy, that's all; but

we part in no ill-feeling, remember; and when I can befriend you, I will. I wish you had not been a fool, Roger!’ He put out his hand kindly, and looked at the young man with almost tenderness.

Roger shook his hand warmly. ‘Promise me one thing only, dear sir,’ he said earnestly; ‘promise that there shall be no unfair play with your daughter, but leave me free to win her, if I can satisfy your requirements.’

‘I will do nothing,’ said Mr. Fenton, emphatically. ‘I cannot answer for others,’ he added below his breath.

‘Thank you, sir,’ again said Roger; ‘your promise is everything to me.’ Then he turned away, once again looking back and bidding good-bye before he closed the door behind him, for the last time as Mr. Fenton’s private secretary.

‘I wonder,’ said the old man to himself half aloud; and then he stopped and thought. ‘Oh no! no!’ he cried out, ‘what would Carry say!’

Roger had no difficulty in finding little Georgie. She, too, had had her fears about the ‘bad quarter of an hour;’ and knowing that her lover had been summoned at an unusual time by her father, hung about the passage, waiting for his appearance.

'Come with me a moment, alone,' said Roger in a low voice. 'I must see you alone, Georgie, whatever happens!'

She felt that something was wrong, and clung to him lovingly—not weakly, but with all her heart of love and girlish tenderness centred in that one earnest, clinging touch. They went into the conservatory—that favourite place for lovers; and there Roger told her what both knew would have to come when their secret was discovered; that Mr. Fenton knew all; that he was dismissed, and must leave the house to-day.

'To-day!' said poor Georgie, hiding her face. 'To-day! so soon after yesterday! Oh, Roger! what shall I do? what shall I do?'

'Trust to God, Georgie, and be a brave-hearted girl,' said Roger with quivering lips; 'and believe in me. Whatever you may hear, and whatever you may not hear—and the one is sometimes worse than the other—never have a moment's doubt of me. Believe in me, as I shall believe in you, though I neither see nor hear of you for twenty years to come; and be sure that the love which can be faithful through absence and trial will be blessed in the end.'

She looked up into his face, and put both her hands in his. 'I will,' she said fervently.

‘ I will believe in you, Roger ; and I will be faithful and true to the last day of my life ! ’

‘ Even if you never receive a written line from me ? For I know that your sister would not suffer us to correspond openly, my Georgie ; and I will not ask you to stoop to anything involving management or intrigue. But, can you believe in me through years of silence ? —perhaps against the harder trial of falsehood, hearing that I was untrue to you ?—going to be married to another ?—all the reports so sure to be set afloat, where there is something to be gained by the severance of two lives.’

‘ Yes,’ she said ; ‘ I know that you will not deceive me ; and I would believe in anyone’s falsehood rather than in yours.’

He caught her to him in a very passion of grief and love. ‘ God bless you, my angel ! now I am satisfied. Oh ! never doubt me, my Georgie. Trust me as I shall trust you, through all things—evil reports, apparent neglect—everything ; and believe, as I do, that if we are true to each other, we must come to a good issue at the last ! Wear this, somewhere out of sight, for my sake,’ he then added, taking his signet-ring from his finger ; ‘ it is my crest, you see—a mailed arm holding a sword, and my motto, “ Faithful and True ; ” and if ever you

are inclined to doubt me, or to waver in your own heart, look at this, and let it bring you back to this moment, and the solemn pledge between us.'

'I will,' she said again very earnestly, kissing the ring, which she fastened to a small chain she wore, and hid in her bosom; 'I never shall be tempted to desert you or to disbelieve in you, Roger, darling; but if I am, I will look at this, and come back to you again.'

He held her in his arms, and pressed her to him. 'Good-bye, then, my beloved! God bless that sweet life! My beloved, my only love! this is but for a time; believe that it is not for long, my Georgie; and again I say to you, trust me! You have no need to say the same to me!'

He pressed her once more fervently to his heart, and kissed her tearful face again and again—she clinging to him with her whole force of love, sobbing now as if her heart would break. And then, the door opening and Mrs. St. John appearing in all the glow of her angry triumph, the brief hour of summer love was at an end, and the long day of sorrow began.

PART II

It had been summer when Roger Lewin and Georgie Fenton brought their happiness to so sorrowful an ending by the imprudence of their love ; it was winter now when Mrs. St. John and her young sister were sitting by the fire in the great drawing-room (where Georgie had been caught and had her ears boxed, for playing chess with the secretary), both outwardly occupied about some woman’s work, though inwardly absorbed in their own thoughts, pleasant with neither if ominously steadfast with both.

By Mrs. St. John’s advice Mr. Hunter had of late, and since Roger’s departure, refrained from any very open demonstrations, contenting himself with merely ‘ paying attention ’ to Miss Fenton—such as sending her the best of his hot-house flowers and greenhouse grapes ; lending her pleasant books to read ; insisting (he had a way of insisting very arbitrarily, if quietly, on a point ; and a great disinclination to ‘ take no for an answer,’ when he had set his heart on ‘ yes ’ instead) that she should ride his little half-Arab Leila, which he declared to her one day in a loud whisper, he had bought for her

use alone—after which she would as soon have mounted a Royal Bengal tiger; making her presents of outlandish curiosities, of which, girl-like, she was very fond; and the like. All of which small amenities poor Georgie knew portended more; and the special thought now agitating the mind of each sister was—'I hope he will not be rash, I am afraid of her yet,' with the one; and, 'I wish he would say it out plainly at once, and then I should have done with him, for a time at least,' with the other.

But neither spoke. Indeed, there had been very little speaking of any kind between the two since Roger went away. There had been no complaining from Georgie; no reproaches; no tears—at least, not in public; but she had silently withdrawn herself from her sister as from a declared enemy, and lived with her as with a stranger in the house. They sat and worked together in the morning—as is usual with the women of a family—while papa dictated letters and his essay on safe speculation to his new secretary in the library, and Mr. St. John, in the dining-room, read the 'Times' from 'hair to nails'—from the first sheet of the Dead and Alive to the last of the sales' advertisements. And they drove out together sometimes, not often; and they dined at the same table; and

sat together again in the evening with papa and St. John for additional companions; and there their intercourse ceased. For all real purposes of sisterhood they were as entirely severed as if in separate houses. A state of things, which be sure sister Carry made the most of when indulging in confidential talk with the neighbourhood; so that little Georgie came to be known throughout Brough Bridge as the most deceitful little varlet in the place, 'very sweet and charming and all that, but leading that poor Mrs. St. John quite a dog's life, and treating her abominably.' The only persons who stood up for her with anything like thoroughness were Charley Dunn, and his great ally, Louisa Globb. All the Globbs, indeed, spoke kindly of her, though they did think her a great many degrees too slow and wondered at her for not being more jolly. But these two were her especial champions, and never allowed an ill-natured word about her to pass unchecked.

Her trial had changed Georgie. From a mere child whose main characteristic was her crystalline simplicity, and who gave herself up to love and pleasure without a question of to-morrow or how was it all to end, she had become a silent and reserved woman, with a charge to maintain and a treasure to defend;

more sweet, perhaps, than when she was only a good-tempered girl who had never known true sorrow, and whose amiability came more from the absence of trial than from the presence of patience ; but so quiet and dispirited, so unlike the blithe, bright creature whose face had turned like a sunbeam on the graver party in the phaeton that happy summer day ! It was all for the best though, she used to say to herself. Her present time of probation would steady her, and make her fitter to be Roger's wife than she would have been if nothing had happened ; and perhaps after all—and this was a great thing for her to say—her sorrows were blessings in disguise as she had so often read, but as she had never believed before. So she waited and hoped and trusted and believed ; and read the second column of the 'Times' advertisement sheet.

Of course she received no letters. Roger had written one ; but getting no answer he knew what had become of it, and that it was quietly reposing in Mrs. St. John's desk ; unless, indeed, she had made an end of it altogether, and burnt it. So he wrote no more, not wishing to afford sister Carry food for either wrath or amusement by his love. But instead of the post he subsidised the 'Times.' Every Monday morning, at

the head of the second column, appeared these words: ‘ Faithful and True ; ’ no more. Sometimes, not always in the very bad weather, on Wednesday or Thursday the same announcement came again, a little varied: then it was ‘ “ Faithful and True.” I also.’ Mrs. St. John could intercept letters, but she could not touch this. She used to see the advertisement with the rest, and comment on it with the rest; laughing at the idea of people corresponding in such a manner, and declaring it to be a smuggler’s trick: she had heard that all these queer announcements were smuggling messages; but she never looked at Georgie when she spoke, not connecting her with the matter in hand. And if she had, the quiet face bending tranquilly over her work would have told her nothing. It was a secret known only to two people in the world, if suspected by a third—Charley Dunn, the ‘ rattle ’ of Brough Bridge. And he, happening to know that Roger Lewin had for crest a mailed hand and arm coupé at the elbow, with the motto ‘ Faithful and True ’ beneath, and being of the nature, as he phrased it, to put two and two together when he wanted to make four, came to the conclusion, not too rashly, that ‘ little Georgie was carrying on that game, was she, sly little puss in boots ! ’ And, ‘ who’d have

ever thought it ! but *mihi beati* ! how love does sharpen folks' wits to be sure !—fancy sharpening up little Georgie Fenton's to corresponding by the "Times !" My word !' said Charley to himself, thinking it all over, a little doubtfully ; ' if that vixen of a sister Carry only knew !'

It had been snowing for forty-eight hours, and the country was almost impassable. A few of the hardier gentlemen in duck shooting boots and rough pilot coats went like feathered millers from house to house, carrying ladies' gossip and dealing out scraps of local news, acceptable in a country place always, but doubly acceptable on days when everyone else was confined to four walls and home faces learnt by heart years ago. Not always by heart, by the way ; but by eyesight and brain, which is more monotonous. And among the rest there came to the Hall where the Fentons lived, Charley Dunn escorting Miss Louisa Globb ; and soon after them, Mr. Samuel Harmer Hunter, bent on his second grand proposal. He would try his fortune this once again, he thought, and if she was still obdurate he would do—he didn't quite know what ; cut his throat, or blow out his brains, or leave Brough Bridge for ever, or, more probably, go home and be very miserable, and drink an extra glass of whisky toddy to make himself sleepy, and so

insure a good night's rest. He was rather annoyed when he saw the obstructive visitors there before him ; but he trusted to his friend Mrs. St. John, and determined to wait the issue of the day's events—a day destined to be of supreme importance to more than one.

Months of futile watching had lulled Mrs. St. John's fears. Daily she had inspected the post-bag ; but, save that first letter written the day after Roger's departure, nothing had come : and though she still asserted her right of looking first into the bag, and apportioning the letters to each, yet she did this rather as a small bit of magisterial authority than as a precaution. To-day, however, the post was late, so that the time had gone by ; her mind was occupied with Mr. Hunter ; and the postman blew his horn so gently, or its sound was so muffled in the fast-falling snow, that she did not hear him ; and, in fact, did not think about him at all. But Georgie, impelled by some strange impulse—she could never understand what—left the room when she heard the hall-door open, and, receiving the bag from the footman, unlocked it, and looked at the letters. For a moment she turned deadly pale, and the ground seemed to reel under her ; but she had strength and presence of mind enough to thrust one letter,

addressed to herself, unseen into the pocket of her dress, before giving back the bag to the servant to take to Mrs. St. John. Then she ran upstairs, scarcely breathing, and not living so much as feeling Paradise about her ; and when she was fairly in her own room, she locked the door and bolted it too, and sinking into her chair broke the seal of her first love-letter—the all but actual presence of the one she loved and who loved her !

How long she remained there, wrapped in delicious dreams, she did not know ; but all this time Mr. Hunter was on fire, and Mrs. St. John on thorns, while Charley Dunn and Louisa Globb looked and wondered, and one at least was in the dark, if the other was half illuminated—a good guess often proving a serviceable lantern when nothing more confessed is at hand. At last sister Carry could bear it no longer. With a flushed face and one of her unmistakable glances, she rang the bell—a little too violent for perfect good breeding—bidding the footman tell Flounce, the maid, to go look for Miss Fenton ; ‘and remind her,’ said Mrs. St. John, with sarcastic spite, ‘that visitors are in the drawing-room.’ Her words were spoken with all her fiery temper up and alive—to Charley Dunn’s distress lest his favourite should feel annoyed ;

though Mr. Hunter, being a man of authority, thought she showed a becoming spirit, and knew when to tighten the reins to perfection.

But Georgie was too well fortified to feel annoyed at anything. The worst she felt was a kind of sighing trouble at being torn away from Roger; but knowing that she could meet him again in the same way, and at the same place, this very evening and for countless days after, she came down on the summons full of pretty blushes and apologies for her rudeness.

‘ I think I must have been asleep ! ’ she said laughing, and opening her eyes wide at the tell-tale timepiece; ‘ I had no idea I had been away so long.’

‘ Oh ! you need not be asleep to be stupid,’ snapped sister Carry in a fume. ‘ You are not asleep all the days of your life, and I am sure you are never anything but stupid ! Just like you, going sitting upstairs without a fire on a cold winter’s day like this !’

‘ Come and warm yourself, Miss Fenton,’ said Mr. Hunter, making way for her to pass between him and the fire.

‘ I am not cold, thank you,’ answered Georgie, not perhaps quite so graciously as she might have spoken. But then one does not like to be called stupid in company; and it is but

human nature to vent one's displeasure on the unoffending. Which was what Georgie did when she passed Mr. Hunter, a little disdainfully, and coaxed herself into a chair next to Charley and Miss Louisa, partly because it was the farthest possible from the iron-merchant and Mrs. St. John, and partly because a thought had struck her on entering the room, and she wanted to 'make up' to Charley Dunn. Dear innocent little girl! she was so transparent in her cajoleries!

In a short time Miss Louisa left her place, and clattered across the room to where Mr. Hunter sat. She wore what it pleased her to designate as 'clumpers,' and they made a noise like a company of dragoons striding over the floor. At least this was what Mrs. St. John said in her peevishness, because she was vexed at the 'intrusion' from first to last, and could not therefore see any manner of good in the intruders. Not that Miss Louisa cared; she only laughed her peculiarly rollicking laugh; and then she attacked Mr. Hunter, whom she wanted to do something for 'society'—that is, she and all her set wanted him to give a ball on the same scale and as charmingly managed as the picnic. When she had gone, Georgie, speaking rather low and very hurriedly, said to Charley: 'Oh,

Mr. Dunn ! come and see what a beautiful tasselled fern Lady Scratchley gave me last week ’ —rising as she spoke, and going quickly to the door of the conservatory.

Charley followed her ; and when they were at the further end, and out of sight of the people in the drawing-room, she turned to him and said, still speaking hurriedly : ‘ Will you do me a favour, Mr. Dunn ? ’

‘ You know I will if I can, Miss Georgie ; a thousand and one, if you like. ’

‘ Yes, I know you will ; you are so good to everyone ! Well, then, if a letter should come to me under cover to you, will you give it me quietly, and not tell anyone about it ? ’

‘ Yes, ’ said Charley, looking innocent.

‘ You are so kind, and I am so grateful ! ’ said little Georgie, putting out her hand.

‘ I would do a great deal for you, ’ answered Charley. ‘ I don’t care for many people more than I do for you, Miss Georgie. ’

‘ You will have done more than anyone in the world has ever done for me, and I do so like your not asking questions. ’ When she said this Georgie gave him such a smile ! Had it been for anything else than receiving a letter from her lover, it would have almost upset poor Charley.

‘ I don’t want to ask questions ; I know all

about it,' cried Charley with a burst, meaning only to be honourable.

'You know all, Mr. Dunn?' and Georgie felt as if she were going to faint.

'Yes; you are, or were—I won't swear to the tense—engaged, or something like it, to Roger Lewin; and your sister has broken up everything, and wants you to marry Hunter instead.'

'Who told you this?'

'You did yourself.'

'I?' cried Georgie, aghast; 'when? how? I never told you, Mr. Dunn!'

'Yes you did; when we went to the picnic at Harrowfield side; I saw it all. For the rest, about Hunter, I know only what everyone else knows, and is talking about.'

'What on earth are you two doing closeted here!' cried Mrs. St. John's sharp metallic voice, as she came briskly into the conservatory. 'What has Georgie been saying to you, Mr. Dunn?' she added, as that young lady, rather confusedly, and without much thought of shoulders or crinolines, pushed by her and escaped.

'I'm sure I don't know,' was Mr. Charley's ungallant answer. 'Nothing of any consequence, anyhow.'

‘ Oh, stuff! I am certain she has been saying something,’ persisted, Mrs. St. John. ‘ She is so odd! Upon my word I think she is half mad!’

Mr. Dunn whistled. ‘ Well, then,’ he said after a pause; ‘ if you know so certainly that she and I have been talking secrets or concocting plots, perhaps you can tell me what they have been all about;’ and he laughed noisily.

‘ Oh! that kind of thing won’t do with me,’ said Mrs. St. John petulantly. ‘ I thought you knew me better, Mr. Dunn!’

‘ But how the deuce can I make something out of nothing?’ exclaimed Charley. ‘ If you know so much you ought to know more; and if you are so very sure that things are going on, you ought to know what things they are, for I’m sure I don’t!’

‘ Don’t be rude, Mr. Dunn,’ retorted Mrs. St. John angrily. ‘ I will find it all out, you may be sure of that! for I can see there is something underhand between you and Georgie, and I’ll not bear it, so I tell you.’

‘ Come, come! no quarrelling between friends,’ cried Charley. ‘ That will never do! never pay the old woman her ninepence, as my old friend used to say.’ He took the irate little lady saucily by the waist protected by his character of the char-

tered libertine, and made her laugh, because, as she said, 'he was so funny.' Then, afraid to remain longer, lest she should find a hook somehow whereon to fasten the quarrel for which she was ripe, Charley made a sign to Miss Louisa Globb, and they both went away into the wind and snow, smoking cigars 'like a house a-fire,' said Mr. Charley Dunn. But he was not alone in this amusement; for cigar-smoking was one of the Miss Globbs' peculiarities, which, though not decidedly sinful, yet stood midway between vice and crime in the Brough Bridge estimate of morals.

Mr. Hunter had come to the Hall meaning to stay to dinner. Things had come to a crisis in his heart, and the sooner the mountain of suspense was smoothed down to the level of certainty, the better. He never seriously contemplated that this level might land him in the uncomfortable swamp of rejection. He was too proud for that—had too high a top to his head, as he used to say, and held his own material advantages too dearly.

The retired iron-merchant was by no means a sentimentalist, and had no very romantic ideas of love-making. With him it was a business pretty much the same as other businesses, to be got through best when undertaken most methodi-

cally, and with least fuss or disguise. He had no notion of hiding away in corners with the girl he wished to make his wife, and there essaying his arts of persuasion unassisted. His wooing, like his iron trade, must be done in the face of day, and with the world and the family for witness. In accordance with which system, he opened his brief so soon as the dinner was at an end and the servants had withdrawn; and there, once again, before father, sister, and brother-in-law, asked Georgie Fenton solemnly: ‘if she would make an honest man who loved her, happy, and consent to be his wife?’

Imagine a girl of twenty receiving an offer of marriage in a well-lighted dining-room, over the wine and walnuts, and in presence of all her family elders! It would have been painful and embarrassing at any time, and under any circumstance of either indifference or love—but to-day!—the pain and embarrassment were as nothing compared to the disgust. With Hyperion Roger in her heart, poor Mr. Hunter was nothing better than a satyr, and a very ugly one, to Georgie Fenton.

‘You say you will not, and you really mean it?’ he asked, as much in astonishment as sadness, when Georgie had stammered out her refusal; for he never could understand why

she, whose fortune would be a mere song when her father died—as he had good reason to know—could not see her interests more clearly, and accept what was undeniably the best marriage in the country. 'What is there against me, Miss Fenton? Tell me frankly; why do you dislike me so much?'

'There is nothing against you, and I do not dislike you,' said Georgie in a low voice. 'But finding fault and marrying are two separate things; and though I do not dislike you as a friend, yet I may not wish to marry you, all the same.'

'You might do worse, child,' put in the father, to whom Mr. Hunter mutely appealed.

'Absurd! ridiculous! giving yourself such airs!' cried Mrs. St. John. 'What can you be dreaming of, you silly girl, to refuse so good an offer, and so kind a man?'

'Do as your sister says,' said Mr. St. John, peeling an orange. He always played chorus to his wife's monologues, and found that a pleasanter office than being in opposition. This he had once tried but had never repeated.

'You ask what is impossible,' said Georgie, looking up and speaking more boldly than was usual with her—a little desperately too, as if at bay. 'Can any of you advise me to marry a

man I do not love, because he is kind-hearted and has money? Is that *marriage*?’ with a scornful emphasis on the word.

‘Why, what else is it?’ exclaimed Mr. Hunter, pushing his grizzled sandy hair straight off his forehead, and looking bewildered.

‘There is something behind all this,’ cried Mrs. St. John, very wrathfully; ‘you would not be so excessively refined and particular and all that, if you had no other feeling!’

‘And if I have?’ said Georgie, with her face all aflame.

‘Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Miss,’ sneered Mrs. St. John.

‘Why more ashamed of myself than you were of yourself, when you married Mr. St. John, and said that you loved him?’ retorted Georgie.

‘If you are going to be impudent, I shall leave the room,’ said sister Carry in a rage.

‘Mrs. St. John! now don’t, pray! Mrs. St. John!’ exclaimed Mr. Hunter, annoyed at the turn things had taken, and quite understanding that little Georgie was not the kind of person to be driven save by himself. ‘Leave Miss Fenton time for reflection, and I am sure she will see her duty better; and do as I and all

her friends desire. She must see that it is her duty: she only wants time.'

'No! no! Mr. Hunter,' cried Georgie. 'I have had time! This is not the first time you have—— done me this honour,' she added, fetching herself up with some difficulty after a pause; it is so hard to be polite when one is disgusted! 'And indeed, Mr. Hunter, if you have any real kindness for me it will be the last. It is very, very distressing to me—of course it is!' she said; and then breaking down entirely, and with no farther hope of manful fight in her she went over to where her father sat, and, kneeling down by him, laid her head on his knees, and took refuge in the womanly sanctuary of tears. 'Papa!' she sobbed, 'do not let them tease me so! Take my part, papa, and do not let them make me so unhappy.'

'I think she must have her own way, Hunter,' said the vacillating old papa, smoothing her hair. 'You are not the man to want a forced wife.' (He was, though. He wanted the fulfilment of his will as much as of his love, and only objected to driving when he did not hold the whip, and when he saw the little creature was 'turning down all manner of streets' where she had no business to go, by the clumsy goadings of others.) 'Let the question

rest for the present. She is very young,’ he added apologetically ; ‘ and though you know that I would like it better than anything that could be proposed, still, if she don’t take it in that light you had better leave her alone.’

‘ Thank you, dearest, best papa ! ’ cried Georgie, taking his hands and kissing them ; ‘ you are my own dear, dear papa, and I love you so much ! ’

‘ How can you be so weak, papa ! ’ cried Mrs. St. John, dashing up from her seat and nearly upsetting a decanter ; ‘ you know what all this encourages ; and yet you condescend to act as advocate to a penniless adventurer by giving way to her fancies like this ! Do you want her to marry a beggar—a mere nobody, after all ? Do you want her to marry Roger Lewin ? I dare say she will say yes, and thank you fast enough then ! ’

‘ My dear,’ said papa, very angrily, ‘ wash your linen at home. You need not publish your sister’s indiscretions ! ’

But the ‘ great word ’ had been launched, and Mr. Hunter knew now the reason of his otherwise inexplicable fate. The whole scene of the dog-cart and the picnic flashed across him, and he wondered at his past blindness. Like most masters over many men, Mr. Hunter

had a profound contempt for all underlings. It was not the personal contempt of the aristocrat looking down from the vantage ground of pedigree on the muddier multitude below, but the contempt of the successful man who had made himself, and who knew no reason why all men should not make themselves as he had done. It was the doctrine of self-help run into aggressiveness—success rampant over worth. Indeed, there was no worth in his eyes where there was not success, and the want of money was with him synonymous with the want of both gifts and virtues. 'No man who is poor can be worth his salt either intellectually or morally,' he used to say; 'and those who fail never deserve to succeed.' It is to be presumed that he did not rank failure in love as of the number of a man's deservings.

With these principles, then, it can easily be understood what he felt when he heard that he had a rival, and a successful one—for so he argued from Mrs. St. John's manner—in a mere copying clerk (he laughed at the title of secretary as a silly euphuism established for pride); a young fellow not making a hundred a year, under the orders of a testy old fool like Mr. Fenton; a mere upper servant in the house, not higher than the governess or the tutor, and

scarcely above the favourite lady's-maid or the confidential man. A copying clerk to be preferred to him, Samuel Harmer Hunter, owning the largest property and the longest purse for twenty miles round! The only thing that could have made him really angry with Georgie Fenton, or that could have induced him to withdraw his suit, was the knowledge of the disgrace with which she had voluntarily covered herself, and the degradation which she had wilfully chosen. She might as well have professed an attachment for the groom as for a young man living on the unassisted work of his own hands, and making a hundred a year for income, not more.

‘ It is a most unfortunate discovery,’ he said, and he could not have looked more solemn whatever he had discovered; ‘ and if you please, Mrs. St. John, we will say no more about it. No talking can make it better, and too much will be sure to make it worse. I am sorry, Miss Georgie, very sorry; I had hoped better things of you: but let all that pass now. Dreams must come to an end some time—the sooner the better, perhaps.’

‘ See what your wicked folly has done!’ cried sister Carry, almost crying with anger; ‘ lost us the best friend we have ever had!’

‘ Ah! that's true! I did not think of that,’ said papa uneasily, taking his hand off Georgie's

hair, and glancing up at Mr. Hunter. But he, balancing his dessert-knife over his finger, mechanically adjusting the pivot, neither heard nor saw; it was only later in the evening that the recollection dawned on him that Mr. Fenton owed him a large sum of money, and that the St. Johns, too, had managed to negotiate a pretty little loan on their own account. And as he thought of this, his face grew dark and his heart hardened.

'You have one comfort to take to bed with you,' said Mrs. St. John, as they parted for the night; 'you have ruined your father and me, and made yourself a beggar.'

'I am very sorry,' said Georgie gently; 'but I cannot sell myself to put things straight. I will work for papa and myself, and do all I can honestly; but I cannot marry a man I do not care for because papa owes him money; nor,' said little Georgie, lifting up her eyes and speaking steadily in spite of her sister's angry glances; 'do I think it right to fail a man I do love, and who loves and trusts to me.'

Saying which she vanished into her own corridor, and Mrs. St. John was left to digest this bitter pill of her young sister's independence and confession as she best could.

'Don't tell me, St. John,' she said to that

much-enduring man when the confidence of night was between them; ‘she corresponds with him somehow. Don’t I know what girls are made of? not one in a thousand has the strength or courage to trust what they don’t see, and certainly not one in a thousand would believe a man constant unless he told them so half a dozen times a week, and a man ever so far away too! Don’t tell me indeed! That young scoundrel writes to her somehow.’

‘Perhaps so, Carry,’ said Mr. St. John meekly; ‘you ought to know best.’

‘I should think so!’ said Carry, snorting. ‘But what shall we do, St. John, if Mr. Hunter takes against us, as he most likely will? We are all in his power, you know; papa, and you and I—what shall we do? He is a dangerous enemy, that I can tell you!’

‘We must do the best we can, Carry.’

‘The best we can! that is just like you, St. John! always some stupid commonplace that helps no one! Of course we must do the best we can, no one doubts that, but what is the best, you stupid fellow?’

‘We must wait and see, my dear.’

‘But I won’t wait and see!’ cried irascible Mrs. St. John, who wanted everything settled now before midnight.

'I am afraid you will be obliged, my dear,' said Mr. St. John, sleepily. Then turning on his side he grumbled out: 'Oh! bother, Carry! don't worry any longer, and do for heaven's sake go to sleep and hold your tongue,' goaded by irresistible drowsiness to this most unusual act of self-assertion.

'What a brute you are, St. John!' muttered his wife; 'you deserve to be ruined!' But St. John was snoring, and her anger might have been left unsaid.

'What can you be going out for?' cried Mrs. St. John, the next day, when little Georgie, in hat and coat and uncompromising balmorals, prepared to set out into the snow with as much zeal and courage as Miss Louisa Globb herself.

'I have been in the house so long,' returned Georgie evasively; 'and I am going to the village.'

'Why?'

'For a walk,' replied Georgie steadily.

'Stuff! you have some other reason, I know,' said her sister in her highest key.

'You had better find out what it is, then,' answered Georgie, walking out of the room, and out of the house almost at the same moment.

'She has gone to post a letter!' said Mrs.

St. John aloud. And for once she was right—suspicion flooding the mind at times with a wonderful amount of clairvoyance. ‘ But I will take care that she has none in return. How the little minx can have learnt his address I do not know. There has been no letter for her—that I can swear to!’

And then she stopped, and she thought of yesterday, and her sister’s long absence, and then—had her strange conference with Charley Dunn any meaning in it?—any occult connection with this disgraceful matter? The more she pondered the more she suspected, and the more she floundered, seeing but dimly.

She watched the postbag vigilantly after this, on the time-honoured principle of the steed and the stable-door; and felt more than ever sure that something was going on, unknown to her, by the very quietness and serenity of her sister. She never thought of ‘ Faithful and True,’ in the ‘ Times; ’ or noticed that Monday was always a specially bright day with Georgie, or that on Tuesday or Wednesday—unless, indeed, the weather was too bad for even gentlemen in duck-shooting boots, or the Miss Globbs—she invariably walked to the village, where she posted a certain letter with her own hands. This fact, indeed, she could not have

known by any method short of bribing Mrs. Twoshoes the postmistress, who was not to be bribed; though she might have judged of all the rest. Her uneasiness was at its height when Charley Dunn called, a few days after the famous Hunterian mishap; and he and Georgie again retreated to the conservatory, where Mrs. St. John found them a few minutes afterwards, Georgie very red and Charley suspiciously nonchalant, pretending—she could see it was nothing but pretence—to be examining the ferns again; as if they cared so much for ferns, they must go in and look at them every three or four days!

Oh, Mrs. St. John! if you could have looked through the screen of plants and stands, as you came pattering so quickly and yet not quickly enough, across the drawing-room, you would have seen Mr. Dunn slip into your sister's hand a letter written in the ex-secretary's broad and clear handwriting; you would have seen her rapid action of gratitude and Charley's brightened face; and you would have understood far more than you do now, when you find them merely pottering about the flowers, as you say, standing at quite a respectable distance from each other, and talking of nothing in heaven or earth worth even your sharp ears to catch!

‘ I am sure that something is going on ! ’ said Mrs. St. John again ; and again she resolved to watch and see.

But love, who laughs at locksmiths, laughs much more at sisters : and when the wit of Brough Bridge took his departure, there was no power in all the house to prevent little Georgie’s rushing into her own room, locking the door, and, half blinded by tears and excitement, reading again and again this second letter from her lover—this second, and the last—for on the following day Roger was to sail for China, as he had told Georgie in the first. This, indeed, was his reason for writing at all—braving the chance of Mrs. St. John’s hands and eyes, in his anxiety that his darling should have as little cause for sorrow as might be.

‘ And now,’ he said, ‘ not even “ Faithful and True ” could reach her ; and they must both live on faith alone—he in a foreign land, and she among the temptations to distrust and forgetfulness of home. It would be only for a few years ; and then he would return, sufficiently wealthy to claim her hand even from her father, and able to keep her as she should be kept when he had got her. She was to believe in him, as he believed in her ; and if she wavered for any cause, save her own deliberate

desire, she was to think of him as living only in and through her love; and that, if this was withdrawn, he should die, having nothing more to live for. But he did not think she would change, for he believed in her as in himself.

It was an earnest, fervid, loving letter, and fed poor Georgie's soul with joy, even while it filled it with anguish at the greater gulf of separation which it opened. And yet, she thought, if it should be really only the beginning of the end!—if this exile to China was the best and quickest way of ending their suspense;—if in a few years' time—'and years fly fast,' said little Georgie with her lips, following the accustomed formula, though in her heart she felt that they lagged with frightful slowness, laden as they were with love and hope deferred—he should return, and be as he said, able to make her his wife!—well, then his present sorrow would be all forgotten, and they would come to their happiness, none the less lovingly blessed for having suffered. In which mood, half resigned and half despairing, but resolute in her love and faith, Georgie Fenton buried her face in the pillows, and cried as if her heart was breaking.

After that day she neither read the second

column in the ‘Times’ nor went to Brough Bridge, on Tuesday or Wednesday either.

Mr. Hunter was not a man of any refinement or real generosity. He was too arbitrary, too selfish, and with too little regard for the feelings of others; he thought too much of money, and had too high an opinion of himself; he was too material, and too rudely ‘common-sensical,’ as he used to call himself, to be refined. What he cared for most in life was to have his own way; and when he could not have that, he had no very great interest in anything. It had been his will that he should make Georgie Fenton his wife. Hitherto she had refused him, certainly, but with so much gentleness and sweetness that he might easily flatter himself as to the reading of the future, and believe that she could be ‘brought round.’ Not knowing of any rival, and alive to his own eligibility, he could not choose but hold on and hope; but now;—while he thought, his face grew very dark, and his heart hardened and hardened till it seemed as if it would harden itself into stone outright.

‘They shall pay for it!’ then said Mr. Hunter, rising from his stiff high-backed chair and walking about the room. ‘They shall learn what it is to insult money and to brave power!’

This he said with his hand on his writing-table, in the left-hand drawer of which was Mr. Fenton's acknowledgment for ten thousand pounds, lent by Mr. Samuel Harmer Hunter, docketed with an I O U signed by Stephen St. John, and bearing in the body of it these words, 'Five thousand pounds.' Fifteen thousand pounds had his wooing of little Georgie cost him: and the result had been—an upper-servant, not worth a hundred a year, preferred before him!

'They shall pay for it!' again said Mr. Hunter, seating himself at the table, and writing to his lawyer. 'Good-natured as I have always been to them, they shall learn that I am not to be insulted with impunity, and that if they have thought to make a catspaw of me, they have been grievously mistaken.'

They had thought nothing of the kind; and Mr. Hunter knew they had not;—but when men are angry they are invariably unjust—and Mr. Samuel Harmer Hunter was angry. Wherefore, he wrote his letter to Mr. Pike, his lawyer, and told him that he must recover these two debts, and be quick about it; and that, for certain private reasons not necessary to go into, he was not disposed to show favour or even leniency. It was a fiery, red-hot epistle, not like his usual calm and well-judging instructions; which made

Mr. Pike purse up his mouth and whistle softly to himself, seeing deep into the millstone. But this was the first time that Mr. Hunter had been smitten beneath his armour, and for once passion triumphed over calculation. When he had written his letter, he felt happier; for now that the war had begun, it did him good to feel that he had carried reprisals into the enemy's very camp, and had burnt their homesteads about their ears.

The family had foreseen nothing of all this. They had felt it an unpleasant mischance that Georgie should have refused so good an offer, and they had considered the fifteen thousand pounds, which her marriage would have wiped out of their books altogether, as an uncomfortable debt which had now to be paid—some time. But as for any open act of hostility on the part of Mr. Hunter, in spite of Mrs. St. John's fretful forebodings which were only temper, counting on his love for Georgie too confidently they expected it as little as a snow-storm in July. When, therefore, they received Mr. Pike's letters, the one addressed to Mr. Fenton and the other to Mr. St. John, requiring repayment of the moneys advanced to them by Mr. Samuel Harmer Hunter at their earliest possible convenience, which meant inconveni-

ence, it was as though a live bomb-shell had burst among them, and they did not at first know how much anyone had suffered.

'This is your doing!' said Mrs. St. John to Georgie, showing her the letter and not sorry to make her the first victim. 'See what your wickedness has brought on our poor father! You have ruined him, and us, and everyone!' she added, with a vague generality of despair.

'I am very sorry, Carry,' replied Georgie kindly, a little frightened too; 'but I cannot see how I can help it.'

'Yes, you can; you see and know quite well, so don't be a hypocrite!' said sister Carry tartly. 'If you would do as you ought; if you were a good, and dutiful, and virtuous girl, and would say that you would marry Mr. Hunter, do you think there would be any more annoyance then?'

'But I cannot marry him,' said Georgie firmly.

'How can you talk such nonsense, and tell such stories!' cried her sister. 'Why do you not say "will not" instead of "cannot?" I suppose there is nothing to hinder you but your own obstinacy and wicked self-will?'

'Yes, there is,' said Georgie, 'there is honour.'

' Bah ! ' said her sister, ' you are a perfect idiot, Georgina ! I declare you are ! '

' Well, I cannot and I will not marry a man I do not love, because you speculated on my doing so, and borrowed money which now you have to pay,' cried Georgie, with spirit. ' If you think it right to try and sell your sister for so many thousands, I am not disposed to allow myself to be bought ! '

Whereat she walked out of the room in anger, and her sister saw her no more for that morning.

Anger, indeed, was the prevailing feeling just now at the Hall. Mr. Fenton was angry with his daughter St. John for having lured him by false hopes to ask this loan of Mr. Hunter ; he was angry with his son-in-law for countenancing it, and with the iron-merchant for acceding to it ; and most of all was he angry with little Georgie, hitherto the light of his eyes, for harbouring a naughty love for an undesirable young man whom he had dismissed, and for refusing to make things straight by not following her plain line of duty. Mrs. St. John was angry with her father for not insisting, with Mr. Hunter for not persevering, and with St. John, with whom she was always angry neither more nor less than usual ; but she, too, most of all with Georgie for refusing.

And Georgie was angry with all of them, for the cool way in which she had been disposed of, bought and sold like a bale of merchandise, and mortgaged even before possession. So that spirits were not very cool or comfortable at this time, and the future looked as dark and stormy as the present. One thing only seemed too certain—Mr. Samuel Harmer Hunter was not going to play the generous creditor; and, though not a cruel man, nor a bad one, still, it was evident that he would rather reduce his old friends to the dust and ashes of ruin for revenge, than quietly lose his money to benefit the family of Roger Lewin's future wife.

PART III

By no possible mercantile transaction short of selling the Hall 'and entering the lodge at the gates,' as Mrs. St. John used to add spitefully, could the Fenton family see how the debts were to be met; or rather, how Mr. Hunter's loan was to be repaid; for nothing else was pressing, though much was owing. The estate was heavily mortgaged already, and would do little more than cover its own shame even if sold;

unless it was sold at a fancy price. Mr. St. John had been unfortunate in some mining transactions; he called it being badly hit; and his private means, which had once been very fair, had gone to mere rags and tatters. Mr. Fenton himself had never been careful about money; but had always spent a penny more than his shilling, using his fortune a little too royally, if pleasantly, both for pride and sense; so that things did really look very awkward for them, unless Mr. Hunter could be brought to relent, or Georgie be made to concede—neither of which two contingencies seemed likely to happen. And in the meantime, Mr. Pike wrote letters of accumulative harshness, and the split between the two houses was widening into a gulf which soon, not even Georgie, as the Curtius, would be able to fill up. In the midst of which discomfort of circumstance and feeling Mr. Hunter gave a grand ball to all the gentry round, and to some that were not gentry; but not, of course, including the Fentons; his quarrel with whom had been the standard subject of gossip for the whole dreary winter month during which it had lasted.

Yet a Brough Bridge ball without pretty Georgie Fenton was Hamlet with the part of Hamlet left out—the summer without flowers—

the winter without Christmas. It was not like a Brough Bridge party at all, said many of the young men, stalking through the rooms discontentedly, and feeling personally ill-used by her omission. But if the entertainment fell flat and dead in the minds of many, it was brisk enough to slender Miss Annie Turnbull, who, now that 'the Fenton girl' as she styled Georgie, was definitively shelved, seemed to think her chance of the Hunterian greenhouses and vineries not so very bad after all. Both she and Miss Le Jeune knew by heart that often-neglected truth, that the best moment to strike is during a rebound, and that a man's heart is never so easy to win as when he has just been rejected by another. And they put in practice what they knew. By the end of the evening they had advanced their chance many stages on the way to certainty; and they saw that, with a few more strokes, the iron which had been so long impervious to their blows would take just the shape they wished. Others thought so too; for Mr. Hunter made himself quite conspicuous by his attentions to Miss Annie, he being one of those crafty pachyderms, who even when they are wounded, never turn their soft side to the world, but present only impenetrable hides and jointed plates of armour which not the sharpest

eyes can pierce through—a man to stare down eagles in his quiet stolid way, and to let foxes eat into his vitals without a cry.

And when the Fentons heard all about the ball, which they did from half a dozen good-natured friends, and were told how Mr. Hunter had opened it with Miss Turnbull, and had danced with her every other dance—such a marked thing, you know, and really quite insulting to the other ladies! only that he danced so badly no one cared, except for the mere look of the thing—and how he had taken her down to supper before all the dowagers, old Lady Scratchley and all, saying quite loud, that beauty was before age in his eyes—and had toasted her as the beauty of Brough Bridge and the belle of the ball, when he and the other gentlemen had made havoc with the remnants;—and when the same good-natured friends, seeing from which quarter the wind was setting, were unanimous in their praises of Miss Annie's beauty and Miss Annie's grace and Miss Annie's lady-like manners and her dignity and aristocratic appearance, and all the rest of it—then Mrs. St. John felt that the Fenton family vessel was really sinking, and that nothing short of a miracle could save it.

The shipwreck seemed none the less immi-

ment when, about a week after the party, Miss Le Jeune and her niece called at the Hall with that unmistakable air and manner of success which tell of a woman's triumph.

'We were sorry you were not at Mr. Hunter's the other night,' began Miss Annie with the most affable manner and in her sweetest voice—she had a great many manners and voices too.

'I hear it was a pleasant evening,' answered Mrs. St. John curtly.

'Oh, delightful! the most delightful evening I have ever had!' cried Miss Annie enthusiastically. 'I had no idea that Mr. Hunter's house had such capabilities of beauty.'

'It is a capital house,' said Georgie, when her sister, disdaining a reply, took to knitting her zebra sofa-cover with portentous energy; 'and has plenty of room for all kinds of beautifying.'

She meant simply what she said, that the space was so large you could do what you liked in it; but Miss Annie told Mr. Hunter, in good faith too that she was repeating the sentiment if a little confusing the words, that Miss Fenton had said, when she, Miss Annie, had praised his house, that 'there was plenty of room for improvement, though it was a large place.' And as Mr. Hunter was proud of his house, and, like

many men who calculate the artistic value of a purchase by its money cost, exceedingly proud of his taste, which he believed to be superior to most men's, poor little Georgie's reported sarcasm did not help to make things sweeter between them.

‘ You should have been there, Miss Fenton,’ continued Miss Annie. ‘ Why were you not? I was looking for you all the evening, and made so sure you would come!’

‘ We were not asked,’ said Georgie, smiling at Miss Annie's transparent falsehood.

‘ Not asked? Why not? Why *you*,’ emphasised a little satirically, ‘ were always such a very great favourite of Mr. Hunter's! What have you been doing to get out of favour?’

Miss Annie's eyes were called grey; but they were of the kind which become sea-green under the influence of certain emotions; and they were green now.

‘ There have been some painful matters between Mr. Fenton and us,’ said little Georgie; ‘ and as he is angry with us, it is scarcely likely he would ask us. I thought everyone in the place knew that he had cut us,’ she added, in her turn looking straight into Miss Turnbull's face.

‘ And we always thought you were to be

mistress of The Oaks,' said that lady maliciously. 'How strangely things turn out in this life!'

'Yes,' said Georgie; 'but it would have been more strange if I had ever been mistress of Mr. Hunter's house.'

Miss Annie gave a little laugh. She thought so too, now. 'There might be worse fates,' she said, smoothing the back of her glove, and looking down demurely.

'A great many,' said Georgie frankly; 'to be mistress of such a place as that would be a most enviable position to most women.'

'Oh! then, it is the man you dislike!' cried Miss Annie, looking up, her eyes very green indeed, and her face in a manner radiant with malice.

'I did not say so,' answered little Georgie firmly. 'I never said I disliked Mr. Hunter, because I do not; but we may like a friend most sincerely and yet not wish to marry him. People never seem to think that possible,' she continued warmly. 'You are accused of personal dislike so soon as you will not marry anyone, no matter what your reason—as if one could marry all the people one likes as friends and acquaintances!' she added, arching her eyebrows as was her pretty trick when excited.

'Well, Miss Fenton, don't be angry,' an-

swered Miss Annie just a trifle insolently. ‘I am sure I had no intention of exciting or displeasing you. You are always so excitable—it is such a pity!’

Georgie laughed. She was too good-tempered to take offence; besides, she was not really excitable. She had only a vehement manner sometimes—not often.

‘Good-bye, then,’ said the ladies, aunt and niece, rising to take leave. ‘Good morning, Mrs. St. John,’ continued Miss Le Jeune; ‘and do not be very much surprised if you should hear something more particular some day soon,’ with an arch glance to where Miss Annie stood twisting her muff.

‘Oh, aunt!’ said Miss Annie; but she did not blush, though she simpered.

‘I’m sure I don’t know about hearing anything particular,’ returned Mrs. St. John tartly. ‘I hope it won’t be anything disgraceful if we do—that’s all!’

‘I know what you mean, Miss Le Jeune,’ said Georgie good-naturedly; ‘and when we are told officially that we may, I am sure we will all congratulate you most heartily!’ and she looked the heartiness she spoke of.

‘What a fool you are, Georgina!’ said her sister, when they were alone.

'Aunt, I cannot make that girl out! Is she a simpleton?' said Miss Annie, when they also were alone.

'I can, my dear. She is in love with someone else,' answered Miss Le Jeune.

'But who can it be, aunt? There is no one in the place to fall in love with—except Mr. Hunter,' said Miss Annie. But the saving clause a little dragged, as if it had been forced out by reflection.

'Perhaps it is with Mr. Dunn, or Adolphus Globb,' Miss Le Jeune answered. 'But whoever it is, she is in love with someone, you may be sure.'

Fortunately for Georgie neither of them remembered the ex-secretary, or connected that drive in the dogcart with the present rejection of the iron-merchant's hand and the ruin of the Fenton family.

Ruin, indeed! for now there was no reprieve possible. Mr. Hunter had been struck, and well struck too—struck home, while the iron was fiery hot with indignation—and he had yielded to the blows and been hammered into the shape desired. Suddenly he awoke to the consciousness of Miss Turnbull's manifold perfections. He became quite a convert to the doctrine of blood as exemplified in her birth and condition—he,

the son of a day-labourer in the mines, whose highest post had been captain of the mine!—he, the despiser of all the my-lords that ever lived, in favour of the self-made men shaping the coarse clay of their own fortunes by their own hands! Also at the same time he found out that auburn hair and green-grey eyes were far more beautiful than chestnut hair and dark-blue eyes; that Miss Le Jeune was worth a dozen Mrs. St. Johns; that Miss Annie Turnbull put Miss Fenton in the shade in everything—mind, manners, appearance, and character; in a word, he formally recanted his professions of faith to little Georgie by making an offer of marriage to Miss Annie, which was accepted without even the pretence of blushing.

The offer accepted was rendered irrevocable by the grand ceremony which took place in the parish church not two months after that tremendous snowstorm when Charley Dunn and Louisa Globb had called at the Hall, and Mr. Hunter had stayed to dine and make love to Georgie after. The whole thing was rather too hurried, perhaps, for true aristocratic dignity; and in its very haste expressed Mr. Hunter’s feverish dissatisfaction with himself and his dread of reflection, as well as Miss Le Jeune’s dread, on her side, lest some untoward accident should occur

even at the eleventh hour, to prevent penniless niece Annie from becoming Mrs. Samuel Harmer Hunter and the mistress of The Oaks after all.

And now what could the Fenton family do but bow their heads to the inexorable decree of fate and marriage, and die decently at the foot of the great statue of Debt as social somebodies henceforth reduced to mere ghosts? Their funeral hymn was sung in noisy fashion enough—set to the jarring chords of the auctioneer's hammer when he put up the old Hall for sale, and Mr. Hunter became its purchaser for a sum not quite two-thirds its real value—when all the neighbourhood swept through the desecrated rooms, and chaffered for precious relics. Fortunately, enough was saved out of the wreck to give them a small means of living; 'better than the workhouse, but only just better,' said Mrs. St. John; and indeed two hundred a year to the past owner of the Hall with its park and pleasant crofts, its conservatory and pretty model cottages, its gardens, seductive shrubberies, gay glass houses, and all the other charms of an English country estate, was little short of beggary—a pittance barely lifting them above actual starvation, as it seemed to them. So this was where Georgie's motto had landed her; and out of 'Faithful and True' was spelled the fall

of one of the most ancient houses in or about Brough Bridge. But though grieved and cast down, and sometimes a little bewildered, Georgie never wavered, and never felt the sacrifice ill bestowed. ‘He will surely come back to me,’ she used to say to herself. ‘God will preserve his life for me, and I know that he will keep his faith untouched!’

This change of fortune brought with it other changes in the family; for Mr. and Mrs. St. John, no longer finding their account in home housekeeping, went off into the world to try what fortune would come to them through a woman’s shrewdness and a man’s supineness—and Georgie and her old father were left alone. This was just the best thing that could have happened to them. It brought them nearer together when love was their only consolation; and, strange as it seemed, the old man was happier now than he had ever been in his life before. For Georgie, doing what she could to repair the mischief she had caused, devoted herself to him with all the intensity of her nature, careful only that his last days should be calm and blessed, and full of the truest dignity and sweetest solace.

The Brough Bridge people stood bravely by their deposed princes. True, they were toadies,

as all are who are poor and worldly both ; but they were also aristocratic, and loyal to their leaders even when in exile. Like devotees to whom the mutilated torso is still the god, they recognised the glory of the Fenton past in the respect which they paid to the Fenton present. The carriages that used to come sweeping up that bold curve before the Hall windows now drew meekly up by the little gate which led into the small cottage-garden ; and it became a point of honour with them all to include ' little Georgie ' in every matter of gaiety set on foot. The same people looked smilingly on Mr. and Mrs. Hunter, of course ;—no one thought of making the Fenton fall a party question—not even Charley Dunn, who had felt it as keenly as if this fall had happened to his own sister ;—but though they looked smilingly, and calculated the dances and the suppers and the good dinners and the archery-meetings, and all the other pleasures emanating from the new inmates of the Hall as worth the sacrifice of a little puritanical sincerity, yet the retired iron-merchant lost more real popularity by his conduct to the Fentons than he would ever regain if he stayed for generations at Brough Bridge. And he knew this, too ; and so did Miss Le Jeune and Mrs. Hunter. A country place is one huge Dionysius' ear, and even

whispers are carried on the heads of the waving corn, or on the breath of the evening wind ; and that Midas has ass’s ears is known to all the gossips for miles round—and to Midas himself—if told only to the eglantine in the hedges or to the clouds in the sky. For which reason he hated (or thought he hated, which answered the same purpose) little Georgie and her father with increased intensity, and never let slip an opportunity when he might hurt her, and so turn the arrow in his own wound dexterously. But she, comforted by her patient duties, secure in her love, and not ill at ease in her conscience, bore everything with unruffled equanimity, and did not envy Annie Turnbull either her husband or her grand home, knowing so surely what greater grace would be hers in the days to come—knowing the reward of constancy and the triumph of faith that would justify her to the world, as she had been already justified to her own soul.

Months passed. The seasons blossomed, and ripened, and waned ; winter came again, and after winter the spring, and then the blooming summer, and then autumn time, and winter once more. Little Georgie’s girlhood, like the spring time, came up to its loveliest culmination and then passed into the summer of mature womanhood ; but still no lover came back from over

the seas to make her his wife, and still her life was fed on hope alone. People said she would be an old maid—oh ! she was certain to be one, unless she would marry Charley Dunn at last, as a reward for his many years of devotion ; but as for anyone else—then there was an expressive shrug—poor Georgie Fenton ! her day was gone by, and such a sweet pretty creature as she was once, too ! Charley Dunn, however, 'didn't do,' somehow ; and Georgie remained single at the little cottage, devoted to her father, and wearing always that same sweet look of inward content which had become habitual to her since their fall. Strange, was it not, that she should be so happy under ruin ?

The old father at last began to droop, and Georgie was soon to be alone. It was in the autumn time, when the days are short and gloomy and the nights are long and dull, and when loneliness is as bad as actual suffering. Yet this trial, too, Georgie had to undergo. Her father died just as the winter set in ; and henceforth her hearth was unshared and her house was empty. She suffered, too, in income ; for the old man, true to his habitual indolence, made no will—would make none—and the two sisters shared the property between them, each having about a hundred a year, the one for her private

pocket-money, the other for her maintenance. And then it was that Georgie had her second ‘ eligible ’ offer in the person of the newly-appointed vicar of the parish, a young and very estimable man, whom also she refused for the sake of that shadowy love of hers over the seas among the Celestials, whose faith she believed in as in the sunshine of to-morrow, and whose love was dearer to her than her life. ‘ Faithful and True ’—no ! she would never forget Roger Lewin’s motto !

Georgie’s hundred a year was, of course, at her own absolute disposal. It was little enough to live on, but with care and good management it did pretty well ;—better in the country where she was known, than in a town among strangers, where she would be judged according to her means only. The capital was in the funds, yielding the standard three-and-a-half per cent. ; and more than one adviser counselled her to sell out, and invest in something more lucrative ; and not a few counselled her to speculate boldly—not wildly, but with judgment and insight ; advising her as if she had been a stock-broker herself, and knew all the mysteries of settling day, and time-bargains, and bills of exchange, and Capel Court stags, and all the rest of it, instead of being a little ignorant country

goose, who never could be made to comprehend even the art and science of banking. For a long time she turned a deaf ear to everything proposed ; but, not being obstinate save on one point, she finally yielded, and gave a power of attorney to Mr. St. John for the sale of her three thousand pounds, he having promised her in a memorable letter always rising up in judgment against him, that it should be invested in a mortgage he had handy, giving her, at five per cent., one hundred and fifty pounds a year, instead of only a hundred and five. Georgie thought the odd forty-five would be very welcome ; and she knew that mortgages were as safe as consols ; so she thanked her brother-in-law for his kindness, sold out her store, and sat down to her lonely dinner, quite rich in anticipation.

Mr. St. John took her money ; and did *not* invest it in the mortgage. With the best intentions in the world, he bought some shares in a foreign mine which was to make everyone's fortune, really thinking that he had thereby secured Georgie a handsome independence for life. Stephen St. John was one of those men who never learn wisdom from experience, and who are for ever twisting Atlantic cables out of sea-sand.

The consequences so fatally sure to ensue to all women who speculate at first hand or second, came to Georgie. The foreign mines, after raising an enormous sum from English speculators, suddenly collapsed; and Georgie, and Mr. St. John himself, and all others who had trusted in them, woke up one morning to irreparable disaster. It was as if the dykes had broken loose in the night; or Solway Moss had again suddenly marched forth, pouring stones and mud and ruin over their whole estates. So now surely the cup was full, and ‘ Faithful and True ’ was the asp round its edge—a mere will-o’-the-wisp, leading her by false likeness of warmth and light through nothing but swamps and quagmires!

She was ruined—more hopelessly than even when Mr. Hunter sent off his angry letter of instructions to Mr. Pike—than even when the old Hall was put up for sale to the highest bidder, and knocked down to her rejected lover at two-thirds its real value. For a moment she felt stunned, and a little sick, when she read Mr. St. John’s letter. The world looked so large and blank and dark to her!—and yet she had to go out into it, and make her way through its desolation as she best could. Earnestly she desired to remain at Brough Bridge; but by

what magic process to get her living out of the inhabitants of this poorly-dowried place? The attempt seemed very hopeless; and yet it must be made; for she must live by work if she would not starve in idleness. She had but one resource; few women have more, or other—she could teach. At least she ought to be able to do so, for she had been well taught herself; and there were a few young creatures about whose minds wanted training such as she perhaps could supply as well as another. Specially there were Mr. Hunter's two children at the Hall—the one a girl of seven, and the other a boy of five—who would come under her hand very well. So Georgie had some circulars printed, in which it was set forth that Miss Fenton would engage herself as instructress in all manner of arts and sciences to all requiring her services, at so much a week—by no means too high terms, poor Georgie! These circulars she sent to all the people round about; and, among others, to 'Mrs. Samuel Harmer Hunter' (the lady liked all her names to be used) 'The Hall.'

'I heard she was ruined,' said Mr. Hunter morosely. He was seldom anything but morose, especially to his wife.

'And I suppose that is why you have been

in such a dreadful temper these last few days,' retorted his wife, whose soul had never shaken off its jealousy, nor had her eyes cleared themselves of their sea-green.

'I did not know that I had been particularly disagreeable,' said Mr. Hunter with a sneer. 'I know too well by this time that I am always disagreeable to you, Mrs. Hunter, whatever mood I may be in.'

'Upon my word, you are not a bad guesser,' said Mrs. Hunter with an unpleasant laugh. 'You are becoming quite brilliant in your old age!'

Then she went to her 'davenport,' and without more words, or anything like consultation with her husband, wrote off to Miss Fenton a cold offer of an engagement for three days in the week only, to teach her two children all they ought to know.

Georgie quivered a little when she received this note. She had never been on visiting terms with the Hunters since their marriage; and of late scarcely on bowing terms. As time wore on, Mr. Hunter had become more and more severe against her; her every trial seeming not to soften, but to anger and inflame him; thinking, with as much bitterness as wounded self-love, of the fine position she had thrown away

for a disgraceful fancy, and of the insult she had offered him in her shameful rejection and more shameful preference. Which showed that at least the hurt of love remained, if of a soured and heated kind, not even skinned over with pity or forgiveness. But painful as it was to her to go to the Hall in any circumstances—doubly painful under the present—it would not do to let sentiment and feeling interfere with her life, thought Georgie; so she buckled on her armour, and answered Mrs. Hunter in her own form, accepting the engagement proffered, and proposing to begin next Monday: it was now Friday.

'I have engaged *that* Miss Fenton to teach the children,' said Mrs. Hunter, contemptuously tossing Georgie's note to her husband. He took it with almost a start, but so easily suppressed that Mrs. Hunter saw only a certain quickness of movement, which might have been mere rudeness or *gaucherie* of manner—'snatching like a monkey,' as she phrased it: 'I suppose she is capable of teaching them the rudiments,' she added, even more offensively.

'I should say better than their mother,' retorted Mr. Hunter, who had passed into the phase of utter disbelief in any virtue, quality, or acquirement whatever of his wife's.

‘ Of course *you* think so ! ’ said Mrs. Hunter, with her unpleasant laugh. ‘ What a pity it was she did not reciprocate your high esteem ! ’

And then they betook themselves to their daily occupation of jangling; which they followed with as much zeal as if their bread depended on its continuance for a given time unchecked.

The day of trial came ; and Georgie went to the Hall, for the first time since she left it with her old father—a ruined man through her. There was the old place—the conservatory where she and Roger had so often had their brief stolen meetings; the large bay windows where he used to snatch a few precious moments more, when lynx-eyed sister Carry was out of sight and hearing; the shrubbery where she played as a child; the fields behind the house where the red cow once ran at her (she could just see the green through the trees, and the old thorn standing in the midst); the way to the back door; the very kitchen window all askew, where old Jane, the cook, had so often given her ‘ sugar-bread ’ through the bars ; —all the old memories of the past came on her in a flood as she went slowly up the walk, counting the flowers, and recognising every

bush and plot, till she stood on the broad low step and knocked at the door.

In the hall stood Mr. Hunter, cold, stony, and insolent with that insolence of despair which knows there is nothing to be had from love. But Georgie had nerved herself, and did not shrink. She went to her work with something of the desperate courage of a man going up to the cannon's mouth, resolved to undergo whatever might be appointed. She bowed to the master as he passed; and he bowed coldly to her; yet the sight of her face in her own hall moved him, and he thought of the time when he saw her last there, she in all the bloom of girlhood, and he in the flush and confidence of love. She was but just twenty then; now she was eight and twenty, and her youth had gone, and years of care and sorrow had dimmed her beauty, and traced on her face the tracks and courses of the future deepened lines—not so far off now! But still the countenance was sweet and tranquil if sorrowful, and pure and loving as always. And when he thought of what love it was that shone upon it, and of his own humiliation, his heart turned into stone again, and he drew back the hand he had more than half extended to welcome her.

She passed him without a word of greeting,

and followed the servant into the drawing-room, where sat Miss Annie Turnbull translated, in her usual aristocratic and transcendent insolence.

Mrs. Hunter bowed as her guest entered ; but she did not rise from her place, and she did not offer her hand. ‘ I presume, Miss Fenton, you are capable of the charge you assume, and of the trust reposed in you ? ’ she said at once, without further preamble, tranquilly continuing her bead-work.

‘ Your children are not very far advanced, I suppose ? ’ answered Georgie quietly. ‘ I do not feel afraid to undertake their education. Would you like to put me through a preliminary examination ? ’

Mrs. Hunter looked up sharply. Was Georgie Fenton really a fool, as she had so often called her, or was there a subtle secret sarcasm in this, almost beyond her own powers of penetration ? She read nothing in the quiet face looking full into hers, but she became uncomfortable herself, and with her discomfort somewhat more insolent.

‘ I scarcely think there is any necessity for that,’ she said, as if half-doubtful on the point. ‘ You were educated as a gentlewoman, and I have no doubt have retained sufficient traces and

reminiscences of that time to be an efficient trainer of a lady's nursery. But, of course, both Mr. Hunter and myself are particular—very particular, indeed—as to the person we place about the children; and you must forgive me for being explicit.'

'You are quite right to be particular, and explicit too,' answered Georgie; 'and I will give you all the information respecting myself that you like to ask. Would you like to know the school I went to when I was young? and about poor dear mamma's family?'

Again Mrs. Hunter was startled; but not liking to undertake a duel where her adversary kept her weapon masked, she prudently retreated. 'What nonsense you are talking, Miss Fenton!' she said tartly; 'as if I did not know all about you well enough by this time!'

'Then I do not see the good of prolonging this conversation,' said Georgie. She had gained her point. 'You know all about me, you say, and have agreed to my terms; had I not better begin at once with the children, instead of taking up your valuable time longer? If you agree to my teaching them at all,' she continued a little hastily; 'it is really a waste of time to enter into the question of my capacity, or whether I am fitted by education and habits

to become the governess of two little children of five and seven !'

'You have not conquered your old excitability, I see,' said Mrs. Hunter coldly, ringing the bell. 'Show Miss Fenton into the school-room,' she said, as the servant entered. 'Good morning, Miss Fenton. I hope I shall have reason to be satisfied with you in every respect,' she added, as Georgie, bowing to her more haughtily than beseemed a poor governess quitting the presence of her patroness, walked away to enter on her first day's duties as governess to the Harmer Hunter children at the old Hall.

When she went home that night, she cried herself to sleep like a baby. But she did not give in. The path appointed for her walking was rough and lonely and stony enough, and her heart failed her for fear of its terrible ways and the pitfalls besetting it ; but she knew that she ought to go through with it to the end, letting neither temper nor sentiment move her—and she did so.

This was the beginning of Georgie Fenton's teaching the undeveloped youth at Brough Bridge ; and soon she had quite a sufficient *clientèle* to make her easy about the butcher and baker, and such grim ogres of destiny waiting

at the back of all unprotected females, self-helping, whose own hands are their only safeguards against destruction. She gained, too, in respect, if that were possible; for the Brough Bridge people liked her staunch adhesion to them, and loved to contrast it with the flighty recklessness of the present day, when 'girls are never satisfied unless they are sprawling all over the world,' as the old Admiral said, puckering up his shrivelled monkey face curiously. Even old Lady Scratchley, who had never been a profound admirer of the Fentons in their palmy days, offered Miss Georgie free bed and board, and twenty pounds a year 'compliment' (she was a euphemistic old lady, that!) if she chose to go to Laburnam Cottage as nominal guest, but in reality as companion. Which was a great deal to emanate from beneath that wonderful beflowered wig; seeing that, as it was, the old lady could scarcely get both tattered ends to meet, and calculated mouths and loaves as if she was calculating diamonds and their settings. But Georgie preferred the cold independence of her governessing; and now that the first shock was over, and she had settled into her new niche in the Hall—where, to do them justice, the Hunters never disturbed her—she liked better to teach the little ones their two and two

make four than to read Balzac and the 'Times' alternately to my lady, varied with episodes of scandal, such as only aristocratic old ladies, despising the commoner sort, can indulge in. In which she was wise; the iciest and hardest independence being better than fetters worn under eiderdown and pranked round with silk velvet, let them be never so slight and never so richly covered.

How everybody was getting married at Brough Bridge!—everybody but Georgie Fenton, who 'hung on hand' in a manner marvellous to all men. Even Charley Dunn, forsaking the colours he had worn on his sleeve for more than twelve years now, took upon himself to reward Miss Louisa's rollicking constancy, and to put their two nothings a year into one common purse, with the rather wild design of making something out of the conglomerate. Maggie Wood and the old Admiral were married last spring; pretty Mary Dowthwaite had hooked and landed young Mr. Whiting Fox, the diplomatist from London; Miss Moss had found her official assignee the year of the Fentons' downfall and Miss Annie's elevation; and one of the Miss Hawtreys had perched on a twig of foreign growth, and sang her little French romances and Italian canzonettas under

a roof-tree of her own. But none of the Miss Globbs had gone off yet, though Louisa had long been talked about with Charley Dunn, and half Brough Bridge said they had been engaged this dozen years or more. Which was premature and an extension of the fact; they only 'made it up last week,' said Charley, 'and you are the first we have told it to after mamma and the girls, Miss Georgie.'

'And I am sure I am very glad!' said little Georgie cordially. 'You are quite formed for each other, and I do not think you could have made a better choice, either of you.'

Charlie winked his eyes; a habit of his when he was rather at a loss what to say; and Miss Louisa laughed one of her loud explosive laughs, like a hilarious ten-pounder going off.

'Only one!' she said, or rather shouted. 'Charley would have had no objection to another choice, if she would have had him, Miss Fenton!'

And then they all laughed; and Georgie blushed for a variation. 'You were always a madcap,' she said to Louisa, 'and will never be better.'

'Never above confessing the truth and sticking to it,' said Miss Louisa.

'Well, never mind, this is the truth now!'

cried Charley, giving her a great hug as they turned homeward through the lane.

‘ Oh! the saints be praised, *I’m not jealous, Miss Georgie!* ’ called out Louisa at the top of her voice. And at that moment the Hunters’ carriage, with Mr. and Mrs. Hunter in state together, dashed past Georgie standing by her little garden-gate. They heard what Miss Louisa said, and it made them wince, though from different causes.

Georgie Fenton, though of a pure constitution, was not strong; and the incessant exposure to all weathers tried her, especially in the winter. She struggled manfully against the feeling of weakness and weariness creeping over her, but she could not overcome it; and it was often almost more than she could do to walk the mile and a half which lay between her cottage and the Hall. Then she caught cold, and had a hollow cough, and a pain in her side, which she in her innocence and bravery called a ‘stitch;’ and so she began to be seriously ill, as everyone who looked at her could see. Even Mrs. Hunter, who at first called it affectation and nonsense and sundry other things of the same moral standard, even she was forced to allow of the excuse which came one day: ‘too ill to leave my bed, but hope to be better soon;’

while Mr. Hunter almost groaned, as he said between his teeth : ' I wish she would die ! It would be the best thing that could happen to her ! '

Thus poor Georgie broke down at last, and the wolf that had been so long kept away from the frail door now put his black paws into the gap which her failing health had made ; and soon it seemed that not only his paws but his whole gaunt body would come through. The people were very kind—very kind indeed, at first. They sent her wine and jelly, and good things which she could not eat : and on some days she was overloaded, and on others almost starving : but, however kind people may be, this desultory manner of nursing an invalid is not very satisfactory. Besides, even the most generous get tired of doing kindnesses to the same person after a time—unless, indeed, they can establish a sort of individual right of patronage, and then they will go on swimmingly for as long as the world knows—and all more or less believe in fairy godmothers, who supply good gifts unseen in the gracious secrecy of the night. All these, and more phases than these, the Brough Bridge people went through during little Georgie's illness ; but she bore up through it all with her own sweet patience, and never

once felt that ‘ Faithful and True,’ which had brought her to this, was aught but a talisman and a blessing.

‘ And even if he should be dead,’ said Georgie weeping; ‘ I would rather live as I do now, true to his memory, to be his wife in heaven, than have any amount of riches from any other man.’ At which Charley Dunn, to whom she said this, wept too, and taking her hand kissed it as if he had been a Catholic kissing a relic, saying earnestly: ‘ God bless you! you are the best and dearest little woman in this world!’

Before the spring came round again, Georgie Fenton was justified in her faith. In the cold winter night came a hurried knock at her little door, and a stranger, snow-clad and with the frost-rime hanging round his beard and hair, entered her small room where she lay on a couch beside the fire, she herself as white as the snow-drifts outside. She started and cried out as the tall, rough-looking stranger dashed aside the little servant at the door and strode in as one with authority; but she cried out no more when he took her up in his arms from off the couch, and held her to his heart, whispering her name. It was Roger—now her Roger, her own, for life and death, for time and eternity—come back as he had promised, and as she had believed and

lived for. 'Faithful and True' both of them had been; and now their day of recompense had come—such as ever comes to truth and fidelity, to courage and to constancy, to honour and to love!

SNOWED UP WITH A BURGLAR

‘BANKS! Banks! Where has the fellow gone?’ cried Smith Butler’s thin, peevish voice from the depths of his luxurious arm-chair, placed in the farthest angle of a broad-leaved Indian screen. ‘I did not see him go down the garden. Where has he put himself, eh?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know, sir,’ answered the footman, looking out of the study window with a great show of earnestness. ‘I turned him away, and didn’t take no more particular notice of him.’

‘Then why did you not take particular notice of him, Banks?’ said his master snap-pishly. ‘You ought to have taken particular notice of him. What do I have you for but to take particular notice of things? A pretty thing, indeed, that you think you may do just as you like, and take notice or not as it suits you. I shall soon have to pay another servant to do your work, and take notice for you, if this

kind of carelessness is to go on.' Here Banks gave an almost imperceptible smile. 'I beg you will go round and see if that man has gone. I do not like ill-looking tramps prowling about the premises, especially just at the time when Carlo has been found dead so mysteriously. Go, I tell you—don't you hear?—and see at once.'

'Yes, sir,' replied Banks, respectfully enough as to outside manner—never mind his thoughts and voiceless words; and he left the room, calmly indifferent to the shrill cries calling him back to give him a thousand minute instructions, as to what he was to do and where he was to go, until obliged to return by the violent ringing of the bell, when he was rated for ten minutes without a pause. And then it was of no use to look after the ill-looking tramp who had disturbed Smith Butler's nerves.

The worst-tempered, most selfish, peevish, irritable man in the world was this same Smith Butler, of Gullystone. Humoured and spoilt as an only child; suffered to tyrannize and domineer as a husband—his wife having been a meek-spirited, much afflicted woman, who would have yielded to a mouse or a gorilla, as the case might have been, if once invested with the name of master; always absolute, always selfish,

he was one of those men who recognise no rights save their own, and who make of their own wishes and desires the sole laws regulating their lives. He was a tall, thin, sallow-cheeked man, with lank grey hair, a high nose and sunken eyes, mere lines for lips, a small chin but a broad jaw, taken from ear to ear. He was in poor health, being of the miserable race of the dyspeptic ; which tended to render him yet more irritable ; and his fortune had been suddenly doubled by a lucky investment, which tended to render him yet more arbitrary. Perhaps nowhere could there have been found a more unpleasant companion or a more tyrannical master than Smith Butler, of Gullystone, or one less respected and less beloved. His poor afflicted wife had been dead for some years now, and had fortunately left no children to bear the weight of his ill-temper in her stead ; but he had an orphan niece, Carry Whiston, his wife's brother's child, who lived with him, and was the sole relation or legal connection he had. She was dependent on him, too, which made the bond between them the stricter, if not the pleasanter ; for, having no money of her own (her father had died insolvent) and Smith Butler designing to make her his heiress if she pleased him, he claimed to have absolute right over her

—soul, mind, and life to be subject to him without reserve. Carry thought differently, and struggled gallantly against her commandant; but Smith Butler held the reins, riding with a martingale which rendered kicking difficult, and the girl's independent spirit went for little in the contest for ever going on between them.

One other person shared in Carry's instinct of revolt—this was Walter Lechmere, the son of Carry's father's nearest friend, and now continuing the family tradition by being the nearest friend of Carry herself. But, unfortunately for the girl, Walter was especially obnoxious to Smith Butler, partly on account of a bad habit he had of speaking his mind, and being difficult to put down by the mere force of assertion; and partly because, having but small means and moderate prospects, he had dared to raise his eyes to Carry, with aspirations more presumptuous than fraternal. And her uncle would not have overlooked this kind of thing even in a lord, without permission first demanded of himself; so that, in a mere nobody like Walter Lechmere, unauthorised love-making was a sin past forgiveness. Wherefore the handsome, dashing, good-tempered young engineer met with but scant welcome at Gullystone, save from Carry. But what he met with from her, on the

rare occasions when he ventured to appear, made up for all the rest.

It was in the winter-time when this vision of a 'dour,' ill-looking tramp prowling about the house shook Mr. Butler's nerves, never case-proof against such assaults. Indeed, it was Christmas Eve; and Carry knew, if her uncle did not, that Walter Lechmere would surely have pressing business in the neighbourhood of Gullystone before the day was out, even though it was now snowing fast, with the prospect of worse weather to come in the leaden sky, which seemed almost to touch the tops of the naked trees as they shivered in the rising wind, and trembled under the weight of the driving snow. And soon, indeed, she saw him from her bedroom window, where she had been watching all the day, come riding along the road, not with the hard and heavy pace usual to him, but slowly and cautiously, his mare tottering and limping, hardly able to do her work. She had fallen with him, and had hurt herself so badly, that it had been a matter of anxious calculation with him whether he could reach Gullystone at all to-day—and what he could do for her, poor beast, if he did not shoot her on the spot. However, doubts were at an end now; for here he was in sight of the gates, and that bright mass

of blue in the centre window waving a small white flag, which he knew to be Carry waving her handkerchief; and soon both man and mare stood before the hall door, and the haven of love and rest was won.

‘Who’s that?—who’s that?’ cried Smith Butler querulously, when he heard the peal of the door-bell and the clatter and clang that followed.

‘Mr. Walter Lechmere, sir,’ replied the ubiquitous and ever-civil Banks, making no sign of consciousness that he was handing his master a bitter pill for his Christmas digestion.

Mr. Smith Butler swore—he often swore—that being about the most energetic exercise in which he indulged; and muttering: ‘I’ll soon send the young dog packing!’ went straight into the drawing-room, where he found Walter and Carry Whiston standing in demure propriety on the hearthrug—young ears being sharp, and he having a resonant cough, always worse when he was annoyed.

‘So, Mr. Lechmere,’ he said, as he entered, ‘to what may I owe the honour of this visit, eh?’

‘Well, sir, I was in the neighbourhood, and I could not resist the temptation of riding over to see my old friends,’ answered Walter cheerily.

‘All very well, sir, for *you*,’ returned Mr. Butler, with a certain feminine spitefulness of emphasis; ‘but perhaps it would have been more becoming if you had reflected whether the temptation was ours or not.’

‘At Christmas time every one is welcome,’ said Walter.

‘Oh, indeed, sir!—that is your opinion, is it? I beg leave to differ from you, Mr. Lechmere: not even at Christmas time is *every one* welcome at Gullystone.’

‘I am very sorry, sir,’ said Walter, turning rather red, while Carry flushed an indignant scarlet; ‘but I fear I must trespass a little on your hospitality, for my mare has fallen with me to-day, and is so badly hurt I cannot ride her back to the station. I am ashamed to say it,’ he added, tossing off his bright brown hair and smiling frankly; ‘but I fear it must be that you either lend me a horse,’ and he glanced at the blinding snow, ‘or give me shelter till I can use my own.’

‘Lend you a horse, sir!’ quivered Smith Butler angrily—‘send one of my valuable horses out with you on such a day as this! Are you mad, Mr. Lechmere? You have just thrown down your own screw, and, from what you say, have very likely spoiled her for life, and you

have the audacity to ask me for one of my thoroughbreds! Do you know what my stable costs me, Mr. Lechmere?—do you know what my horses are worth at Tattersall's? Had you not better ask me for my servants and my carriage and my plate and my banker's book, and all that I have at once? Am I a stable-keeper, that I should supply every young gentleman who chooses to ask me for a riding-horse at his pleasure?' Here he stopped, out of breath and coughing loudly.

'Then I am afraid Mr. Lechmere must stay here, uncle,' said Carry, with a fine show of not particularly caring which way it went. 'It is twelve miles to the station; his own horse cannot go, and you will not lend him one of yours—of course; so what can be done? It is such a tremendous day, too; he would be very likely lost in the snow if even he attempted the walk; and it would not be very pleasant to have that said of us.' She turned a little pale as she uttered these last words.

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Mr. Butler tartly. 'Lost in the snow, forsooth! Is he a baby, or are we living on the Alps?' and he went to the window to look out. But even he could not deny the terrible severity of the day. It was not merely a heavy fall of snow, but a storm and

tempest of snow, with a wind that howled like a hungry wolf, and sharp flying showers of ice that cut and bruised and stung, as if they had been flying fragments of iron. It was a day on which, for the sake of his private pride and public repute, even the owner of Gullystone could not refuse shelter to a decently-dressed enemy; though, had it been a shade less severe, he would have turned him out to fight his way through it as he best could, without a moment's hesitation or remorse.

'It may clear up,' he then said sullenly. 'It *is* rather bad now.'

'And if it does not, you must make up your mind to stay here quietly, Mr. Lechmere,' chimed in Carry rather quickly, as she bent her head over her embroidery.

'Thank you, Miss Whiston,' was Mr. Walter's reply to this. 'I am sorry to trouble you, but I confess I do not see how it can be very well helped.' Then, without drawing breath, he plunged off into a long account of a Spanish railroad for which he was negotiating (to be the chief engineer thereof, that means) till Smith Butler grew so irritable at the sound of his voice—that cheery, mellow voice, which a friend of his always said reminded him of pineapples—he could really bear it no longer; so, with an

audible expletive of a peevish rather than an excessive kind, he turned his back on the pair, and left the room in a pet. It was always a trial to him when fate and circumstance overmastered his will; and in the sacred depths of his own sanctum he growled and fretted himself into a small fever, while the young people, unmolested, went straightway up to heaven in the drawing-room.

A bright-faced, bright-eyed, red-lipped, and most sweet-tempered girl was Carry Whiston. She was pretty, too, in her brown-haired, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed style—a little too round, perhaps, for perfect artistry, but not heavy enough for clumsiness if less than graceful. She was a sweet, soft, caressing and caressable thing, such as I have heard called ‘a lovely woman’ by those few who understand classification and nomenclature—thoroughly healthy both in mind and body; clean, pure, and fresh. But with all the softness of her form and the sweetness of her temper she was by no means weak or nerveless, having plenty of will underneath her geniality. She had velvet paws that did not cover claws to scratch and wound and rend, but that did cover small bars of iron which held their own undauntedly, and would not be beaten off or unclashed by any means save their own free will. She was engaged

now to Walter without her uncle's knowledge—naughty puss!—and distinctly against his wishes—which, perhaps, was naughtier still; only that her own dear papa would have liked it. This reflection a little soothed her conscience when it became importunate on the subject of submission. And being what she was her lover knew full well that no intimidation, no persuasion, no cajolery, would make her unfaithful, or cause her to swerve a hair's-breadth from her promise.

‘I do not know what would become of me, Carry, if I could not trust you!’ said Walter a little sadly, while they were sitting together after Mr. Butler had left them.

‘You know you may trust me, Walter,’ answered Carry fondly. ‘Uncle wants me to marry poor George Grey; but I don’t think you need fear him as a very formidable rival!’ she added with a laugh.

‘Well, I don’t think I need,’ said Walter. ‘Let me see, how tall is he, Carry?—up to your shoulder?’

‘About,’ she said, laughing again; ‘at all events, not up to my heart, Mr. Walter.’

Which was such a pretty conceit, if not quite original, that Walter helped himself to a double allowance of a certain form of small change current between them, to which he

was not wholly unaccustomed nor she obnoxious.

‘He was to have come here to-day,’ Carry then went on to say, when that little interlude was ended. ‘Uncle asked him to come over and spend Christmas with us; but it is such a terrible day—and, fortunately for us, he is such a poor creature—that I don’t think he will come.’

‘But he would come in a close carriage, would he not?’

‘Oh yes, of course,’ Carry said. ‘I do not think he can ride; I am sure, indeed, he cannot. I know he cannot drive, and I know he cannot row, so I do not suppose he can ride. Fancy such a miserable creature!’

‘He may come then,’ returned Walter gloomily. ‘Is he afraid of his horses?’

‘He is afraid of everything,’ she said with a pretty little disdainful air; ‘but not afraid in that way. He might be afraid of the day for himself, but that would be all. Oh!’ she exclaimed, with a deep flush and an accent of extreme vexation; ‘we need not discuss the matter further, Walter dear, for here he is.’

And as she spoke, George Grey’s handsome, well-appointed carriage drove slowly up to the door.

This same George Grey, of Grey's Court, was not really bad. He was simply contemptible, judged by the woman's instinctive standard of what is admirable and fitting in a man. Small, weak, effeminate—what would have been weak and effeminate in a girl, so what must he have been as a man!—without the physical strength or robuster moral qualities of his sex, cowardly, nervous, conscientious and good-natured, irresolute, and utterly unable to 'stand up' for himself, no matter what the provocation—by no means good-looking, so that he had not even the small prettiness sometimes seen in unmanly and insignificant men, to compensate for his want of power—he had absolutely nothing to recommend him to a woman's favour save his fortune, and the certainty of being mistress should she consent to be his wife. As for love, that was impossible with most; certainly quite impossible with such a girl as Carry Whiston, too healthy and natural herself to be very tolerant of anything abnormal in others. And indeed the feeling with which George Grey inspired her was a physical shrinking—a loathing of the flesh—such as some people have for frogs or mice or earwigs or blackbeetles, or anything else of which they are not exactly afraid, as we use the word, but to

which they have an invincible repugnance and instinctive disgust. But for all that, George Grey persevered in his visits and his suit. He was desperately in love with Carry, poor fellow; and in spite of his constitutional timidity, breasted her displeasure, defended as he was by the ægis of so powerful a protector as Smith Butler, who had promised him her hand by next spring. They did not count upon the slender iron bars within the velvet, or take into the general reckoning Walter Lechmere's power of attraction, and the small change in current circulation between him and Carry, whenever, by good chance, they met and were alone.

This was the first time the two aspirants had stood face to face; and surely even Smith Butler could not, in his heart, blame the choice which Carry had made. George Grey, not quite five feet four—wanting a quarter of an inch to that height—with a weakly-knit frame, where the narrow shoulders sloped violently from the slender neck, and where the hips were a trifle the wider of the two, where the knees turned inward, and the hands and feet were like the dry, bony paws of some small beast, had but little chance in a comparison with Walter Lechmere, six feet without his boots, strong, clean-limbed, and muscular—a first-rate fencer,

a first-rate boxer, a capital shot, a good oarsman, a daring horseman—well up, indeed, in every manly exercise, and holding high rank in every manly sport; while as for beauty, how could that mottled, unwholesome face, with the sandy hair and the greenish eyes, ever weak and wavering, the sandy down on the lips and chin, looking more like a smear than even an incipient beard, be spoken of in the same day with the thick, curly, bright, brown hair, the broad white brow, the bronzed cheek, the frank blue eyes, quiet and steady, and that full beard, soft and glossy, as belonged to the first flush of his young manhood, and of that luxuriant and well-shaped kind that is as fascinating to womanly eyes as the trim ankle and gimp waist is to manly ones? Had George Grey, uncomely as he was, been a very angel in nature, and had Walter Lechmere been a good-looking fiend, I sadly fear most women would have compounded with the fiendship for the sake of the beauty; but when, if their virtues were equal in the sum, Walter's were at least the manlier of the two, Carry had not a single inducement to forsake her own love and take up with her uncle's, save, indeed, that one sole lure of money, which was no lure to her.

Very uneasy, and abashed and troubled was

poor George Grey when he heard the name of that formidable-looking guest who had preceded him, and whom he found so comfortably established in the drawing-room, holding silks, while Carry wound them off his hands, as if he had been her brother—or more. But Smith Butler told him fretfully ‘not to mind’—how could he expect to succeed if he was always so—expressively—afraid? Must not every man run the risk of rivals? What did he want more? What the deuce *could* he want more? Had he not him, Smith Butler, at his back; did he want a regiment of uncles to make sure of a silly girl, bound to obey his will? So he argued from the dark angle of the Indian screen; and George Grey, who was quite as much afraid of his champion as he was grateful to him, was fain to hold his peace, poor little man, and to pretend the serenity he did not feel.

The afternoon wore away, the storm ever deepening and the wind howling with increased fury as the evening came on; till, while they were at dinner, it seemed as if there must be some terrible catastrophe, so wild and fierce and uncontrolled as it was. It made both Smith Butler and George Grey turn pale and nervous, it blew so fiercely, with such an unstrained kind of expression in the howling blasts

that tore about the chimney, and shrieked against the panes; but Carry and Walter only laughed, as at their best friend; and, who knows? it might continue even over to-morrow, and Walter be bound in his pleasant prison for another twenty-four hours.

‘A foolish trick that of yours, Mr. Lechmere!’ said Mr. Butler suddenly, and with much ill-temper: he had been thinking the same thing as Carry and Walter, and chafing at the prospect of his enforced hospitality and this most untoward rivalry. ‘I have always heard you boast of your horsemanship; not very like a good hand to throw your mare and injure her, as it seems you have done, most seriously; seriously, Day said, did he not, Banks?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Banks, in his Rhadamanthine official voice.

‘I was riding down hill and she stepped on a loose stone,’ returned Walter. ‘The ground was as hard as iron, you know, sir, and as slippery as glass.’

‘And of course you were riding at a break-neck pace!’ sneered the host.

‘Well, I confess I was going a little too hard for prudence,’ answered Walter, throwing his hair from off his forehead. Carry had once told him that she liked that action of his, and, with

the unconscious vanity of the beloved, he was constantly repeating it now.

‘I have always understood that it is very dangerous to ride fast down hill,’ said George Grey hesitatingly. He was a conscientious little man, and did not like to speak as if he understood things of which he was profoundly ignorant.

‘It is not over safe,’ answered Walter carelessly.

‘Then why did you do it?’ Carry exclaimed impulsively, pausing in the very act of cutting the damson tart.

‘I was in a hurry, Miss Whiston,’ was the answer; and Carry blushed up to the roots of her hair, meeting the bright blue eyes levelled at her meaningly.

‘Did you meet a tramp not far from here?’ then asked Smith Butler, who had not seen this little bit of bye-play.

‘No, sir, I did not,’ Walter answered. ‘I met only three men on my way from the station; only three in all the twelve miles; and they were by no means a pleasant-looking triad, I should say. But they were not in my way so I did not trouble myself much about them.’

‘Three tramps did you say? Bless my soul! that makes four in one day! and Carlo is just dead,’ cried Mr. Butler uneasily.

‘Carlo, dead? Poor old fellow! I did not know that. When did he die? and what did he die of?’ asked Walter.

‘Why, Caroline, did you not tell Mr. Lechmere that Carlo was dead?’ exclaimed Mr. Butler peevishly. ‘Bless my soul, what were you thinking of, to be so remiss as not to tell him that remarkable fact? Banks! why did you not tell Mr. Lechmere that Carlo was dead? Did anyone ever hear of such negligence?’

‘He was found dead in his kennel this morning,’ said Carry. ‘He was quite well yesterday, and I heard him bark very much in the night, and this morning he was dead!’

‘Dear me, how very extraordinary!’ simpered George Grey.

‘Most extraordinary!’ said Mr. Butler with emphasis. ‘I believe he was poisoned, you know; and to-day comes a tramp about the place who must have vanished into snow I think, for no one saw him go down the garden, and you did not meet him, you say, Mr. Lechmere; so where the deuce the fellow got to I cannot for the life of me imagine.’

‘Oh! he has hidden himself in the hayloft for shelter,’ laughed Walter, not particularly interested in the subject.

‘Oh, has he?’ said Mr. Butler grimly.

‘Banks, tell Day to search the hayloft this moment, and come and tell me if anyone is hidden there or not. Better for him not to be; that is all I can say!’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Banks. He went into the kitchen, where he and Day (Day was the coachman) had a good laugh at ‘master’s fads,’ over an extra pint beyond their allowance, and then he returned to the dining-room and reported Day as having ‘gone to see;’ and in due time he reported him as having found the loft perfectly tenantless. He had never stirred from the kitchen fire; but that was of no consequence. Mr. Smith Butler was content; and, looking across the table to Walter, said sneeringly: ‘One of your follies as usual, Mr. Lechmere, you see!’

‘Not very unlikely though, sir, was it?’ said Walter laughing.

‘Very unlikely indeed, I should say,’ snapped Mr. Butler. ‘I only gave way to the absurdity to satisfy you; I never thought it likely myself.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Walter, quite tranquilly; and Carry put in: ‘It is always better to sift things if possible,’ without laughing.

On the whole, then, this Christmas Eve dinner was rather a troubled and uncomfortable matter. Mr. Butler paid George Grey marked

attention, and openly slighted Walter; while Carry would not speak much to the one and dared not to the other; making up, though, in kind looks for what she was obliged to forego in words. And as they were still in that blissful state of early love, when the very presence of the beloved is happiness enough—even under the jealous jailership of a hundred eyes, they were happy enough. As for the other, Mr. Butler was too arbitrary to fear, and George Grey too timid to demand.

The evening went better. Carry played and sang, while her uncle dozed, George Grey stared at the fire, and Walter Lechmere turned the pages for her, and put in a bass when her voice needed the support. And the warmth and music and brilliant lighting of the room, as well as that subtle glow of Christmas time, which all the innocent and happy feel, made the lovers forget the storm raging out of doors—or, if reminded of it, they blessed it as shipwrecked seamen bless the wind that blows them into port; while making them also so lovingly confident of the future, and so sure that their happiness would some day be perfected.

At last it all came to an end and the party separated; Walter and Carry more in love than ever, and more resolute and happy, and George

Grey more deeply and profoundly wretched. And as they separated, Smith Butler said fretfully: 'That fellow has quite shaken my nerves to-day! I shall dream of him, I know, and very likely have the nightmare. An ill-looking dog! I wonder what the dickens became of him!'

'Well, uncle, did you dream of the tramp?' said Carry the next morning.

'Yes, I did,' he answered sourly; 'and what is more, I could have taken my oath I heard stealthy footsteps walking about the passage, and the dining-room door unlock and open!'

'Oh, uncle!' laughed the girl; 'what a fancy!'

'I suppose it was a fancy, Caroline,' said Smith Butler grimly. 'But it was not one to laugh at, for all that. Shall I ever teach you softness or respect of manner?—shall I ever make a lady of you?'

Carry coloured. It was not very pleasant to be snubbed, she thought, before Walter and George Grey; but the pretty little pout of but half a moment passed off like a flying shadow from a flower-bed; and, going round to where her uncle sat warming his feet and spreading out his hands to the blaze, she laid her fresh round cheek on his sallow forehead and said

caressingly : ' I did not mean to be disrespectful, uncle.'

' Which does not alter the fact though it may modify its meaning, Caroline,' returned that gentleman sententiously.

Then Banks coming in with the urn, they placed themselves at table, and the breakfast began ; both Walter and George Grey internally convulsed with love, each in his own way, and longing to have been that grim and coffee-coloured uncle, if only for the bliss of that one sweet caress.

Suddenly Mr. Butler spoke : ' Caroline ! ' he said, hastily and angrily.

' Yes, uncle dear ? ' she said as the bright face turned like a sunbeam to him.

' How often have I said I would not have the food sent up to our table touched in the kitchen ? '

' Well, it is not, uncle,' said Carry a little anxiously ; ' what has been touched ? '

' My pigeon pie,' said her uncle furiously, and he struck the handle of his knife upon the table. ' Look here—what do you call this, eh ? Is this not being touched ? What do you mean by this, Caroline ? ' He dragged the dish forward.

Carry saw to her dismay the pigeon pie,

which was her uncle's peculiar breakfast dish—touched by no one but himself—more than half devoured.

‘Ring the bell at once,’ he cried; ‘and have up Banks to answer for himself. I will have no foolish stories told me of cats or mice, perhaps blackbeetles, but I’ll know the truth of this at once—at once!’

So Walter rang the bell, and Banks came to the summons, as he always did, as quickly as if he had been listening at the door.

‘Banks! what is the meaning of this?’ exclaimed Mr. Butler, pointing to the dishonoured pie.

‘It’s come now!’ thought Banks. ‘Well, sir, I can’t exactly tell you,’ he replied calmly. ‘This morning when I came down-stairs the cellaret door was open, and I see a lot of port-wine and brandy had been took; and when cook went into the larder, there was plates and a knife and fork, and this pigeon pie all pulled about ten times worse nor you see it now, and one leg of the turkey gone, and bread and other things eat beside. But who did it, sir, I know no more nor the dead, nor does none of us down stairs: for we’ve all been a-talking of it over, and can’t make nothing of it noways.’

Smith Butler turned pale and pushed back

his chair. 'Do you mean to tell me that we have robbers concealed in the house?' he said. 'Snowed up with a legion of burglars waiting to murder us?' He became violently agitated and his cough grew convulsive.

'I don't say that, sir,' replied Banks respectfully; 'but I do say as how it's a curious thing, and no accounting for it, as I can see.'

'Are any of us sleep-walkers?' said Walter.

'Bless my soul, Mr. Lechmere, what rubbish you do talk to be sure!' Smith Butler cried. 'Sleep-walkers!—sleep-walkers do not walk into pigeon pies and turkeys' legs! Such foolish observations do no good, sir! They only distract one's mind from the main facts, and are worse than useless. For the present, as Banks says, I see no way of accounting for it. So, Banks, you may go; and here, take this mess down-stairs, and never let me see a pigeon pie on my table again as long as I live; do you hear?'

Banks and his master were right; there was no accounting for such an extraordinary phenomenon; so the fact remained as before, unexplained and inscrutable—the fact of a midnight appetite among them, which had satisfied itself on Smith Butler's own peculiar

viands—even prowling into his larder, and violating the sanctuary of his cellaret. There the thing remained; but Walter brought a little serenity to the host by offering to search the house thoroughly after breakfast and make sure no one was concealed within its walls. And then Mr. Butler felt glad that to-day was as bad as, if not worse than yesterday, and said, quite cordially for him :

‘We shall be obliged to keep you prisoner over our poor Christmas Day, I see, Mr. Lechmere. It is impossible for you to face such weather as it is.’

He thought that, if they were locked up with a burglar, it was quite as well to have Walter Lechmere’s strong arm and well-known courage to help them through; George Grey being a ‘muff,’ and he himself but a ‘poor creature, owing to his health;’ Banks ‘not to be depended on—men-servants never are;’ and Day living out of the house, at the end of the garden, with his wife—the family laundress, and his brother—the family gardener.

Walter bowed and smiled, and turned rather red, and thanked Carry’s uncle warmly; and after breakfast they all went through the ceremony of ‘searching the house thoroughly.’

They made quite a formidable party—the

three gentlemen and Banks; and they looked everywhere (save in Carry's room, of course), peering into every closet and every recess; George Grey especially great in looking behind window-shutters and chests of drawers, and other places leaving a clear space of about a couple of inches or so: but they found nothing—not a trace, not a line of the midnight consumer of Mr. Butler's pigeon pie. There was a small kind of dust-hole in the farther garret, which they did not enter. The door was locked, and the key had been lost these twenty years, Smith Butler said: so they passed that by as labour lost indeed, to stir up the dust of twenty years, though Walter would have got the door open by some means or other, had he been allowed to do so. But Mr. Butler, who had become tired by this time, was peevish and cross; so they all streamed down-stairs again—Walter laughing at the whole affair, and even George Grey putting in his perky little word of scoffing courage, so fearfully like a bantam's crow.

What a strange day it was, this Christmas Day! Here they were, actually 'snowed up,' and unable to get a dozen yards from the house. Day, the coachman, had attempted to get down the road, but had been obliged to turn back

again; the way was utterly impracticable. Gullystone was one of those unfortunately-situated places always 'in' for everything bad that came in the way of weather. Floods, snow, frost, winds, spent most of their fury on this lone bleak house; so that when Day reported them prisoners by drifts, no one was surprised. Drifts higher than a man on horseback, and of that thin, powdery snow which will not bear anything heavier than a weazel or a stoat, hemmed them in on all sides; even round the house many of the lower windows were blocked up and darkened with the piled-up heaps. And the drifts were increasing; for it was still snowing as thickly as before, and the wind was still blowing from the same quarter, though not so fiercely. There was no help for it; they were all caged and imprisoned as surely as if they had a guard of soldiers or a grating of iron bars to keep them in; and, enemies or lovers, sick or well, sad or joyous, they must make the best of it, and pass the time as pleasantly as they could.

Smith Butler was of neither help nor hindrance as things were. He was in too feeble and irritable a state of nerves and health to bear society for many hours at a time; so he went to his study soon after breakfast, where he

made believe to read, but where he did really doze for half the day, and the three young people were left to themselves. If only that horrible nuisance, that George Grey, had been out of the way, thought Carry and Walter, what a time of veritable paradise it would have been!

But George Grey was an institution for the moment, and they must bear with him,—bear with his silly simpers, and his wild dashes at love-making, at which Carry laughed to his face when she did not reject them more scornfully; as, when he came up to her once, trembling and dancing and simpering, and looking more like a stage imbecile than anything else, and asked her, point blank, boom! like the firing of a cannon without ever a match being lighted: ‘to give him a lock of her hair as a Christmas present, it would be so nice!’

To which said Miss Carry, disdainfully enough: ‘I will give you a lock of Fido’s, Mr. Grey; that will be more to the purpose, I think!’

But George simpered again, and said: ‘Oh fie, Miss Whiston! to compare yourself with Fido!’

But, as all things come to an end at last, so did this strange Christmas Day; getting itself

buried beneath the holly and the mistletoe, the plum-pudding and the punch, and the rest of its national grave-clothes, not to reappear for another three hundred and sixty-five days; when it would spring upon the earth again, fresh, lively, youthful, and jocund as before, making glad hearts and happy homes; healing up old sores, and cementing new ties; and again get joyously buried and put away among the dead sweets of time.

And when they were all in bed and asleep—only poor, irritable, peevish Smith Butler sleeping in short snatches, and waking for long dreary watches,—a thick-set, brutal-looking, begrimed man crept cautiously out of the closet in the garret, which Walter Lechmere would have opened but was prevented, and, with the aid of a dark lantern, made his way noiselessly down-stairs, and again devoured Smith Butler's viands, and drank his brandy and his wine. And while he ate and drank, in his stealthy wolfish silence and rapacity, he glared round at the valuables in the dining-room, and, handling a pistol concealed in his pocket, said in a hoarse whisper to himself: 'Ah! we shall have a rare swag when the time comes!' Then he crept back to his lair again, and carefully locking the door after him with a

skeleton-key that could lock and unlock most things, pulled over him a pile of rugs and a huge wolf-skin 'borrowed' from the hall, and turning round on his side, went to sleep without snoring.

On the next morning, the scene of yesterday was in a measure renewed. Again had food been eaten and wine drunk by some one on the premises, getting up in the dead of the night to satisfy his unearthly craving; and still the mystery as to who it was, and why, remained as dense as ever. Even Walter was puzzled and Carry a little uneasy; while the servants were as scared as if there was a real live ghost among them, and George Grey was unaffectedly frightened of his own shadow. As for Mr. Butler, this second mystery completed the prostration of his nerves. He sat in his study all the day, his head bent on his breast, his nervous hands drumming restlessly on the table, and his every sense strained like the senses of a man in incipient brain-fever, to catch the faintest sound or sign of anything extraordinary. But the house was as still as the tomb, save for the occasional bursts of music wafted from the drawing-room, or the quickened step of a servant-maid, scurrying through the passages as if pursued by a spectre. The theory of ghosts

not eating brought but little comfort to them ; and when Banks, in his quality of hero, ridiculed their fear of burglars and the like, reminding them of that thorough search through the house, not a few among them shared George Grey's ideas respecting the space which solid bodies are supposed to occupy, and mentioned places, as unexplored and likely, into which nothing thicker than a deal board could have crept.

By the afternoon the weather changed. The wind fell, a steady rain came down, and a quick thaw set in ; and by the early evening 'the roads might be presumed to be open,' said Walter, a little maliciously, glancing at Carry : 'and should he relieve Mr. Butler to-day?'

To which the old man replied angrily that he would not suffer him to leave on any account ; he absolutely forbade it ; he would not hear another word about it. What ! leave them in the state in which they were, with a vampire, a ghoul in the house ! a thing shut up with them, they knew not what nor where—but, whether tangible or intangible, a mystery and a horror !—a murderer, perhaps ; perhaps a raving maniac : and Walter (he called him Walter in his agitation) to think of leaving ! No ! he would not allow it ; decidedly and distinctly he

would not. And Walter did not need the prohibition to be repeated. Then, seeing that Mr. Butler was getting really ill with fear and nervousness, he offered, if it would be any satisfaction to him, to sit up this coming night, and watch for the intruder quietly—in his own mind, unspoken to anyone, he suspected poor Banks, and made very sure he should catch him—which offer Smith Butler accepted unreservedly, adding a half-surlly compliment on his ‘pluck’ which sounded more like a sneer than a compliment. And so another day passed like the former, in the lovers’ almost unalloyed happiness, in George Grey’s unalloyed misery, and in Smith Butler’s as well, to bear his company.

The night came on. There was still the same heavy pelting rain, falling, falling, like the endless pattering of beads ; but there was no wind with it. It was a straight incessant downpour—the kind of rain which dulls all sound, both because of the humidity of the air, and the hard, unending patter of the drops. When they had all gone up to their respective rooms, Walter went quietly downstairs again—taking a loaded revolver with him to satisfy Smith Butler, though he laughed heartily at the precaution.

For some time he sat by the dying embers

of the fire, till the last spark of that too disappeared; and he was in the dead unlighted dark. But all was still—not a sound, not a whisper, save the plashing of the remorseless rain and the loud ticking of the clocks. Gullystone was a large, old-fashioned house, truly; and the servants' offices were quite distinct from the dwelling part of the family; and as Walter was watching to catch the thief at the cellaret, he did not watch for burglars, let noiselessly in at the kitchen-door by a barefooted confederate concealed in the house. No one sitting where he was now, in the dining-room with the door shut, could possibly have heard the slight rustle that was made as the three men passed in, then crept up the kitchen stairs in their listed shoes, noiselessly, stealthily, one by one.

Suddenly was heard Smith Butler's voice—first one wild, piercing shriek, waking the dead echoes of the night with horrible force; then a rough voice as if muttering an oath, and the muffled sound of a man's struggle.

Walter dashed up the stairs, the revolver in his hand; and in less time than it takes to write, stood in Smith Butler's room, face to face with four armed men. Two were ransacking the room. Already boxes were broken open, wardrobes and safes and drawers were all rifled,

while many valuables were flung in a heap on the floor. A third ruffian held the poor old man by the throat ; while the fourth was just slipping across the passage to where Walter's room door stood a little ajar.

What followed was the deadly struggle of men for life. Four against one were heavy odds ; but Walter was brave, with the bravery of blood and training, which goes further than the bad courage of desperate crime. He shot down one man levelling a pistol at his head—it was but the turn of a hair whose shot was first ; another he stunned with the life-preserver he wrenched from his own hand ; but the remaining two were pressing hard upon him, and one had already wounded him severely with his knife, when Banks appeared, in the scared way of footmen rudely awakened, and snatching up Walter's revolver, which had been knocked out of his hand by one of the men now upon him, fired. It might have been in the air ; it might have been at Mr. Butler, or at Walter, or at himself, for all he knew. He fired blindly, instinctively, and by chance ; but, by good providence, he happened to hit one of the two remaining burglars, and brought him to the ground with a broken leg. And now the other, seeing that the game was up, leaped down the

stairs and dashed out into the darkness of the night, leaving his three companions wounded and bleeding on the floor. By this time, too, Walter had fainted; and by this time, Carry, roused by the shots, had rushed into the room, calling her uncle's name and Walter's, to meet a ghastlier sight than she had ever dreamed of. By this time George Grey had been pulled out, shivering, from under the bed where he had hidden himself, and set to such useful work as he could perform, by Banks, who, now that he had only prostrate foes to deal with and was master of the situation, came out grandly; and by this time, poor Smith Butler demanded special care, for he lay as if dead, paralysed with terror, and it was long before he could be restored.

So now there was enough to do in the house, and every one must work with a will. Of the three men wounded not one was vitally hurt. The two who had been shot were disabled, but no more; while Walter's knife-stab, just escaping the heart, was of infinitely worse complexion. However, things all wore round in time. The doctor and the constable were sent for; and between the two, the inmates and the disturbers of Gullystone were pretty well cared for. Almost as soon as it was

light next day George Grey crept crestfallen homewards. Carry did not care to conceal her disdain for that cowardly act of his—how cowardly it must have seemed to her, rushing into the very midst of danger to bear her part with the rest, and share the perils, or shield from them, the one she loved, let her own braver deeds explain! The poor, meek, tortured creature could not bear his shame, but sorrowfully and miserably retreated to Grey's Court, and in a few days wrote to Smith Butler a formal renunciation of his pretensions to Miss Whiston's hand.

When Walter Lechmere made *his* demand, Smith Butler no longer withheld his consent; acknowledging, a little unnecessarily, that perhaps it was better, on the whole, to have a man in the establishment who could fight if required—one needed such things sometimes. But his consent was given only on consideration that Walter live at Gullystone quietly, and did not attempt to take Caroline away, or to follow his profession in Spain, or any of that nonsense. He was to stay here as the fighting man and family protector—did he hear? and if he did not like that arrangement he should make no other.

As Walter did like the arrangement the

marriage took place in the early spring ; and, if the Dunmow flitch was not claimed when justly due, it was not because it ought not to have been. But Smith Butler did not live long under the shadow of Walter's protecting manhood. The burglary and the personal violence to which he had been subject were too much for him ; and he died before another Christmas Day came round, repeating, in the last feeble wanderings of reason just preceding his death, with an accent expressive of profoundest horror : 'Snowed up with a burglar !'

ROSE BLACKETT AND HER LOVERS

‘Yes, I suppose it is a good thing,’ said Fred Whitfield, yawning a little indifferently considering the occasion. ‘You see my mother made it up, so that I don’t take much credit to myself in the matter. I dare say I might have gone in and won on my own hook if I had liked; but I left it all to the old lady. She likes managing. So she and Mrs. Blackett laid their heads together, and Rose and I said yes.’

‘Well, Fred, you certainly are the most extraordinary fellow!’ said his friend, laughing; ‘I don’t think many people would imagine you were speaking of your marriage.’

‘Dessay not,’ returned Fred. ‘People go in for such a jolly lot of bosh on those occasions; they cannot understand that one should have any common-sense in the matter. Time’s gone by for blisses and kisses, and Cupids and arrows, and all that rubbish; and it’s all very well, you

know, to like the girl you are going to marry—but hang it all! one needn't make a fool of oneself about it! I like Rose Blackett very well. She's a nice girl enough; no nonsense about her; can ride well, which is something, and plays croquet first-rate; she is good-tempered, and, I am thankful to say, without sentimentality; so we hit it off exactly. But as for being over head and ears in love, and all that stuff, I'm far too used up for anything of the kind, and she is too sensible. We marry because our mothers wish it, and because—as they wish it—we might as well marry each other as anyone else. I can't say I particularly want to marry anyone; but I suppose I must do my duty that way; and so you see I do it.'

'All very well, Master Fred, but I cannot say I think you are in a proper frame of mind,' said Harvey Wynn; 'and I only hope that when I am going to be married I shall be over head and ears in love with my wife. I don't think I would let my mother make up a marriage for me, however sensible in its outlines.'

'Ah! but then you are such a deuced romantic fellow,' laughed Fred. 'Now you see I have gone through all that, and have come out on the other side; and so I save myself no end of trouble and anxiety; and, let me tell you,

that is no contemptible thing to do in life, if you can.'

'Just so,' said Harvey; 'and by that reasoning the more nearly we get down to oysterdom the wiser our philosophy.'

'Not a bad idea, Harvey. An oyster must have a jolly time of it till he's caught. And even then—we are all caught some time or other; so what does it matter?'

'Not much, perhaps; but I cannot say I like the oyster theory. I like to live up to the fullest of my powers while I do live, and when I have worn myself out, then it is time to die. But vegetation, social or emotional, does not suit me.'

'All the result of temperament and organisation, my dear fellow,' said Fred languidly; 'you see you have a big heart and big lungs and big muscles and a big brain, and are a son of Anak altogether. I have a weak heart and weak lungs, and more nerves than muscles, and an irritable brain which has to be kept quiet by the never-to-be-sufficiently-praised nicotine; and so emotion and excitement and all that sort of thing bore me to death; and, in fact, I am not up to them, and that's just it.'

'One would think you were a poor, little, miserable starveling to hear you talk,' shouted

Harvey. 'A six-foot Life-guardsman not "up" to anything! and the best cricketer and boldest rider to hounds in the county! Who is talking bosh now, Fred?'

'Perhaps I am, and perhaps you are; but it's too much trouble to decide,' yawned Fred lazily.

And Harvey knew that when his friend culminated to this point, there was no good in talking to him any more. Fred was of the bored school—good-hearted and honourable, generous, brave, affectionate in grain—but he had spoilt himself by the affectation of indifference, by pretending to be so terribly superior to all the weaknesses of enthusiasm or emotion, and by making believe—and it was only make-believe—that there was nothing in life worth living for. In aid of which philosophy he had put on a lazy, lounging, careless manner, inexpressibly annoying to earnest and energetic people, maintaining that the cultus of nicotine, as he called it, was the only thing worth a sensible man's devotion; though he added a kind of bye altar to Bass.

His friend Harvey Wynn was a very different kind of person. Tall, muscular, broadly proportioned, his face not handsome so much as honest and strong—(Fred Whitfield was allowed to be the handsomest man in the county, and the

most distinguished in appearance and manners—when he chose)—full of life and spirits and animal energy and vigorous thought, impassioned in a strong manly way, and romantic too, always in earnest, and never frivolous—surely it was only by the law of contrasts that he was the friend of languid, used-up, affected Fred—only by the theory of compensation that the conventional club-man about town found anything harmonious in the country doctor who took life in heroic doses, and even then complained of inanition! But one does sometimes see these odd friendships; and Fred Whitfield loved Harvey Wynn better than he loved any human being, save, perhaps, his mother; and Harvey loved him, but with that sad kind of love which one feels for people who might be so much better than they are if they would but be their truest selves. So it came to pass that Harvey, who was to be groomsman, was invited to Fred's house for the few days now intervening before the marriage took place. He had only just arrived when they had the conversation given above; and as yet had seen neither the old lady, as Fred irreverently called his mother, nor, of course, Miss Blackett, who lived rather more than two miles from the Hawse—the Whitfields' place.

His introduction to the mother came first.

She was a handsome, stately woman, with the mien and manner of a duchess ; a cold, courteous, iron-hearted kind of person, who wore rich black silks and point-lace caps, and despised poverty as on a par with vice and crime. Conventional, proud, cold, worldly—Harvey understood now whence had come the flaw that ran through, and so pitiously marred, the beauty of his friend's nature.

Mrs. Whitfield was very civil to Harvey. She was in too good a humour about this marriage of her planning not to be civil to everyone ; for Rose Blackett was an heiress, owning now some five thousand a year in her own right, with inheritance to come ; and she was glad that she had secured so rich a prize for her son, when others, and men of higher social standing (notably my Lord Marcy Masters and Sir James Ventour) were pretendants in the same field. So that Harvey only felt in a general way the ice and iron of her nature. To himself individually she was all graciousness, of a stately not to say grim sort.

But one thing he did see, and that was, that she was feverish and overstrained, and looked ill, and as if on the point of breaking down. His profession taught him that ; besides having by nature the full use of his eyes.

‘I am glad that my mother likes you, old fellow!’ said Fred, when she left the table. ‘I know her manner so well, I can weigh to an ounce the measure of esteem she gives to anyone; and I can tell you—if you care for it—that you are in class number one with her: which makes it more comfortable for me, you know. I hope that Rose will like you too, and then we shall be all right.’

‘I hope so too,’ said Harvey laughing. And then they talked of other things.

The next day they went over to Lisson, where the Blacketts lived.

Mrs. Blackett was a meek, mild, inoffensive creature, with weak eyes—always dominated by the last speaker and given to easy weeping. She had long been under Mrs. Whitfield’s influence, whenever that lady chose to exert it; though, since Rose had grown up, there had sometimes been fierce collisions, when the poor lady had been put to terrific straits, not knowing which sovereign to obey. Fortunately for her, Rose was too fond of liberty to be domineering; and, so long as people would leave her alone, was content to leave them the same. So that, unless Mrs. Whitfield annoyed her personally, and sought to curtail her individuality, as she chose to phrase it, she let her manage her

mother as much as she liked, and gave no heed to the direction which that management was taking. It was only when Fred asked her to be his wife, saying: 'You see, Rose, the old ladies have made it up between them; but we can't do better, unless you are not for it,' that she understood the meaning of the last few years.

'She did not care much about the matter one way or the other,' she said; 'she liked Fred better than either my Lord Marcy Masters, who was old enough to be her father, or than Sir James Ventour, who was half a fool;' so she said: 'Yes, very well, Fred;' and there the thing rested. And that was about the extent of love-making that had been between them.

While Harvey was 'making himself agreeable' to Mrs. Blackett, Fred Whitfield went out on a roving commission to look for Rose, who was never to be found like any other young lady, in the drawing-room; but always where she had no business to be—in the stable, or by the dog kennel, or shooting at a mark with a real pistol as she used to say, or practising croquet, or doing something that was not needlework or anything else essentially feminine. A turn of the scale more, and Rose would have been 'fast;' as it was, she was only free. Fred found her, as usual, in the yard, superintending some tre-

mendous proceedings connected with Fan and Fan's puppies, and after their first off-hand greetings (they met more like two young men than a lover and his betrothed) he told her who was in the drawing-room, and asked her if she would go and see him.

'That's your friend come to see you turned off?' she asked. And Fred said yes, it was.

'Oh, very well! of course I'll go,' cried Miss Rose, without the shadow of a blush on her face; 'but you know, Fred, though I don't care about such things myself, it is terribly like being trotted out for show.'

'Oh! nonsense, Rose,' drawled Fred. 'Harvey's far too good a fellow to have any such disagreeable ideas.' And they went into the drawing-room together.

Certainly Rose Blackett was a very pretty girl. Tall, graceful, and yet with a certain look of personal power about her, which some men like in women, though others repudiate; with large dark eyes of uncertain shade, and thick, rich, glossy hair of the brown that sits next door to black; small hands, now thrust into dog-skin gauntlet gloves; small feet and dainty ankles, which the looped-up dress and curt red petticoat showed to full advantage; dangling her hat with its sweeping feather in

one hand, while sticking the other into the pocket of her short jacket with the big metal buttons, half careless, and half defiant, she was altogether a 'girl of the period,' after the best models of her kind—just a little too jaunty, perhaps, and a shade too indifferent, but evidently a fine-natured, pure-minded, high-hearted creature, as yet in the block, and unawakened. At a glance Harvey read it all.

'She does not love him,' he said to himself; 'and has never loved.'

The two young men stayed to dinner on Mrs. Blackett's invitation; and, at first amused, then surprised, Harvey ended by being indignant at the cavalier indifference with which Fred treated his betrothed. Indeed, the whole thing was really painful to him; it seemed to be so little earnest, and so devoid of the poetry and passion of love. And this was sacrilege to him, who thought of marriage as of an earthly heaven, and who would have given all he had in the world to be loved by such a girl as Rose!

'How often it is that people have what they don't prize, and that others would give their lives for!' he said to Fred as they drove home.

'Yes,' said Fred, wearily. 'Some men like love-making and all that bother; I confess I don't.'

‘You do not give yourself too much trouble about it,’ said Harvey, secretly nettled, but attempting to laugh. ‘Of all the indifferent lovers that ever lived I should say you were the most indifferent.’

‘It suits Rose,’ said Fred; ‘and I am sure I do the best I can under the circumstances. It is such a stupid position for a fellow to be in, altogether; and even Rose, though not silly, and not a bit sentimental, dislikes it as much as I do. Did you see how she blushed when she came into the room to see you?’

‘I saw she looked very beautiful and rosy,’ replied Harvey; ‘but I did not notice that she was particularly embarrassed or blushing.’

‘No, not embarrassed; she is not the kind of girl for that; but she coloured up.’ Which seemed to have impressed the young man as something wonderful; for he spoke of it again before they got home.

When they reached home they found that Mrs. Whitfield had gone to bed, suffering from a slight attack of fever; by to-morrow morning she was decidedly ill; and in a short time dangerously so. It was an attack of nervous fever, and for a time her life was despaired of. Of course the marriage was put off indefinitely now, until she recovered; and, as Harvey Wynn

was free, not having yet made a practice anywhere, he agreed to remain in the house in close attendance, until she had passed the crisis, either for life or death.

And this was how it came about that he took up his quarters at the Hawse, and, by consequence, became well acquainted with Rose.

Rose was not merely 'the jolly girl without any nonsense about her' as Fred proclaimed, and as she ostentatiously proclaimed herself to be, in deed, at least, if not in word. Harvey, who had no love for 'fast' girls, and who had the power of truth to elicit truth, soon found her out, and told her plainly that she was acting a part which neither became her nor belonged to her. It was all very well, he said, that she should like riding, and be fond of dogs and horses, and even enjoy firing at a mark—though he hoped she might never develop into a sportswoman, clever at killing pheasants, or hares either; but it was nothing but affectation trying to make herself into the bad imitation of a man, and pretending to be ashamed of herself as a true woman. Women were women, he said; and not all the big buttons or easy-going slang in the world could make them anything else; and, whatever the fast school might

say, there was a grace in softness, and a power in love, and an ennobling influence in enthusiasm; not to be had in stables and hunting-fields; 'and womanly work is womanly glory, Miss Blackett,' continued the young doctor, warmly; 'and home is not merely a "place to sleep and feed in," as you say, but the emblem and enclosure of woman's truest life. And all this you ought to feel strongly and enact steadily, because you are strong and steadfast.'

This he said earnestly, for he was too thoroughly manly himself to uphold 'as truly womanly' incapable or imperfect women; and the thing he liked the best in Rose was her power and that dash of manliness in her which might be turned to such noble account if she would.

'And when you have made me all these fine things,' she said, her eyes kindling as she spoke, but not with enthusiasm; 'what will be the good of it? Much Fred will value me! Much the world will understand me! One gets no good by such heroics, Mr. Wynn. People do not care for them, so what is the good of them?'

'I am sorry you think so,' Harvey answered. 'I should have expected from one so entire as yourself the recognition of a good for its own

sake, quite independent of the sympathy or understanding of the world.'

'One must be understood by someone,' she answered; 'and the more one's nature is called out, the more need of a response.'

Then she blushed—cheek, neck, and brow, all one burning crimson—while her eyes dropped, full of thoughts and feelings better left untold.

Harvey felt his own heart beat with strange violence while he watched the face before him; but he was not a man to show what he ought to hide. With an effort he drove the blood back to its calmer current again, and simply answered: 'The response always comes some time in life, Miss Blackett.'

She raised her eyes to his. 'Is everyone happy, then?' she said. 'Is every marriage well suited?'

'There are other means of happiness beside marriage, though this is the greatest,' he said; 'a woman's home has generally other loves and other duties beside the one of the husband; and at the worst there are friends.'

'Friends!' she said scornfully; 'what good are friends to one?'

'You think so? I had hoped for a different verdict,' said Harvey.

'Oh, you are not a mere friend,' cried Rose;

‘at least, not the kind of friend I meant,’ she added; and again she blushed to the very roots of her hair.

‘No; I am more the brother than the mere acquaintance,’ Harvey said, in a low voice, altered, too, in its tones;—‘your future husband’s brother-friend—I am yours also, am I not?’

‘I suppose so,’ she answered coldly, turning away as if offended.

Something not quite so fiery as wrath, nor so happy as mirth, came into Harvey’s eyes as he watched her move away discontentedly, perhaps more hurt than annoyed; but he did not follow her, and in a few moments she came back to him, smiling as usual, as if she had done battle with the evil spirit within her and had driven him out.

But when Harvey parted with her that day, she went into her own room and wept as if her heart would break; and he, for the first time in his life, felt inclined to hate Fred Whitfield, and to curse his blindness and fatuity.

Had it not been for the young doctor, Mrs. Whitfield’s life would not have been worth many hours’ purchase. More than once during her illness he had dragged her out of the very jaws of death, and had now so far recovered her that

the wedding-day was again discussed, and only waited Harvey's sanction for the invalid to risk the fatigue and excitement consequent.

'Oh, bother the marriage!' said Fred, taking his mother's hand. 'Rose is a dear, good girl, and will wait till doomsday, rather than you should risk anything, mother. There is no hurry, and we can wait quite well until you are strong; can't we, Harvey?'

'Very well indeed, I should think,' Harvey answered, with an almost imperceptible dash of sarcasm in his voice. 'But it is not good for your mother to be anxious; and she seems to be anxious to conclude this affair. Of course it can be nothing to me,' he added hastily. 'I have no purpose of my own to serve in the delay or the conclusion.'

He had thought. As it was to be, it was better concluded with all decent speed, he said to himself; and then he, at least, would be out of danger. She, perhaps, needed no such precaution; and yet—those blushes of hers, and that eager tremulous face had wakened strange thoughts in him. Hush! he must not dream such dreams. What would he think of himself, a poor, penniless, country doctor, if he came here as his friend's almost brother, and, in return for his love, broke off his marriage with an

heiress, and secured her for himself? The thought brought the blood into his face, and made him loathe himself, as dishonoured in soul, for even harbouring such a vision.

So it was arranged that the settlements should be signed, and that next week the marriage should actually take place, Mrs. Whitfield's health not preventing. And when Rose was told this, she wept again; and to her mother's intense dismay, burst out with: 'Mamma, I will not marry Fred Whitfield!'—an announcement which that fine lady put down to insanity, as the mildest term.

The day following this decision Fred could not go over to Lisson; he was detained on some business or other at home; so the young doctor rode over, with a note containing a request for the two ladies to dine at the Hawse this evening, seeing that on this side one was disabled and the other detained, and no intercourse possible unless they would kindly come.

'Certainly,' said Mrs. Blackett a little nervously, glancing at her daughter, who, with her head thrown up, stood sideways to her.

'And you, Miss Blackett?' asked Harvey.

'Oh, by all means!' said Miss Rose, not quite pleasantly, at least to her mother's ears. 'I want to speak to Fred very seriously.'

‘My dear!’ remonstrated Mrs. Blackett, and then she left the room.

‘What has happened?’ asked Harvey impulsively.

‘Oh, nothing,’ answered Rose; she was standing now in the bay-window, looking out into the garden, so that her face was not seen. ‘I have only told mamma that I am not going to marry Fred; and she is put out.’

Harvey reeled like one struck. Had his senses played him false?

‘Indeed!’ he then said after a long pause; ‘your determination is sudden, Miss Blackett.’

‘Yes,’ she answered with assumed carelessness; but her quivering voice and bashful eyes belied her assumption. ‘Now that it has come so near, I feel that it will not do; and I am sure Fred will feel with me.’

Again Harvey was silent. What could he say? that he thought Fred would consent to give her up, being utterly unworthy his good fortune? that he hoped he would keep her still to her word, when he hoped just the reverse? that she was doing wrong to be honest, when he loved her for it more than he had ever loved her before? What could he say? Truth and honour were on opposite sides, as sometimes happens in life; and if he said what he thought, he

would say what he ought not to say. So he kept silence; and Rose was not quick enough to divine why.

While they were standing in this awkward position, both too much moved to speak, a carriage dashed up to the door, and 'Mr. Norton' was announced. Mr. Norton was Rose's trustee and guardian, in a way; though that young lady had full power over her own funds, and did not in general either ask advice as to what she should do with her own, or defer to it, if given. And being of the school which 'goes in' for a great many things better left alone, she 'went in' for speculation, on a tolerably large scale; so that, since she came of age, she had placed most of her money out at nurse, she said; but she had chosen, unfortunately for her, the most capricious nurses of all—mining property. However, she would do it; so she had no one to blame but herself. Not even smooth-spoken, cleanly-shaven Mr. Norton—who had helped her, by-the-by, to more than one 'good thing,' in which he himself had taken shares that he generously handed over to her, after private advices received and pondered over. And when Mr. Norton came Harvey left, bearing with him the promise that the two ladies would come to dinner at half-past six precisely.

They were to come as much before as they liked, but not a moment after.

When they came it was easy to see that something had happened. Mrs. Blackett was depressed and tearful; her eyes were red and swollen, her face was puffed and pale; she spoke as if she had a violent cold, and in every other particular of manner and person showed that she had been weeping bitterly. Rose was flushed and excited, with a certain bravery of manner which trembled too nearly on bravado to be quite as lovely as might have been. But she looked beautiful—perhaps more beautiful than she had ever looked in her life before; and even lazy Fred seemed struck by her, and warmed up to unwonted feeling.

After dinner she asked him to go with her into the library; for she was utterly unconventional in all she did, and would not have minded asking a prince to tie her shoe, or anything else that she might desire, being just a little touched by the self-will belonging to the heiress; and Fred assented, wondering what was up and what she wanted. When she had shut the door: ‘Dear old Fred,’ she said, in a coaxing voice, ‘I want you to do me a kindness.’

‘I am sure I will, Rose,’ said Fred, naturally, and without his drawl.

‘You do like me, don’t you, now?’

‘Why, yes; of course I do. I think you the best girl going,’ answered Fred, opening his eyes.

‘And would not like to hurt or distress me?’

‘By Jove! no,’ he cried. ‘I should think not, indeed!’

She was standing by the fire, leaning one hand on the chimney-piece, with the other just lifting her white gown over her ankle, her foot on the fender, showing her silk stocking, bronze slipper, and a bit of broad needlework as a flounce above.

‘Well, I will take you at your word,’ said Rose. ‘I want you to give me up, Fred, and break off the marriage. Come, now; are you a good enough old fellow for that?’ she added very coaxingly.

‘Break off the marriage, Rose!’ cried Fred, all in amaze. ‘Are you dreaming?’

‘Not a bit of it,’ she answered, laughing a little hysterically; ‘quite serious and wide awake.’

‘But I cannot give you up, Rose,’ said Fred. ‘My mother has set her heart on the marriage; and it is so near, too, now; and I do love you—a great deal more than I have said or shown,’

he added, stirred out of his affectation. 'You know, Rose, how I hate the idea of sentimentality or spooneyism with anyone; and I have fought off that as long and as well as I could. But I am not the indifferent beast you may think me. I do love you, Rose, and I cannot give you up.'

She had turned quite pale during her lover's speech. 'Well, Fred,' she then said; 'of course I am very much obliged to you, and all that; but I have not been playing a part, and I do not feel a bit more than I have shown; so that we are not on equal terms, if you love me so deeply as you say and I am simply in the old way of good-fellowship. Mind that, and never reproach me hereafter; for I have told you the truth, remember. And as for your lady mother, I don't think she will make much objection when she knows all—because, dear old Fred, I am ruined.'

'Good God, Rose!' cried Fred; 'what on earth do you mean?'

'Well, you know, I have been going in for speculating; and so Mr. Norton came down to tell me to-day that all my great expectations are come to nothing; the Bella Juanita mines are drowned; and I have not what will realise two hundred a year instead of five thousand. And

so I think the question of Mrs. Whitfield's consent is settled, is it not ?'

'Now, then, Rose, I will not give you up for anyone in the world,' said Fred, in a deep voice. 'My mother may say what she likes, and you may say what you like—the marriage shall go on. This day week you are my wife, come what may ! I never felt how much I loved you before to-day, Rose, when there has been just a chance of losing you.'

'But if I don't want to marry you, Fred !' urged Rose, touched in spite of herself by the unusual warmth and chivalry of the man.

'Oh, bosh !' said Fred. 'You are not the girl to have been engaged for three months contentedly enough, and then turn round just at the last moment, and say you don't care for a fellow. I quite understand you, Rose, dear old lassie ! You think that my mother will not like the match so much now as when you had money, and that you are not the catch you were before you had lost it ; and so you would release me. But I will not be released, Rosey ; and so I'll tell my mother when she speaks to me about it, if she takes that tone at all.'

Upon which Rose did what was a most extraordinary thing in her to do—what Fred had never before seen the slightest inclination in

her towards him—she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him; and then burst into a violent flood of tears, which soon passed into hysterics—when he was obliged to call the servants and Harvey Wynn.

So now the whole thing came out, both to Mrs. Whitfield and to Harvey. Fred had no idea of making mysteries and keeping secrets unnecessarily; but he noticed two things as the result of his communication, that his mother looked decidedly displeased, and as if she had made up her mind in a direction different from his, and perhaps with more stability; and that Harvey, whose face had lighted up with strange passion, suddenly burnt himself out, and became cold and ashen and 'odd.' But Fred Whitfield was not remarkable for penetration; so the coil coiled itself a turn tighter, and no one seemed likely to get out of the rounds, or to be free of its strands. Rose could do no more than she had done; Fred could do no less; and for once in her life his mother was powerless, and he flatly refused to obey her. His nature had been ploughed up for the first time, and the weeds had been cut down and the good seed had sprung up. Rose Blackett, however, and Harvey Wynn were as miserable as it often falls to the lot of people to be by the virtues of

another. If Fred would only have been selfish and narrow-hearted, how many days and nights of suffering would have been saved!

The time was coming very near, now. It wanted only three days to the wedding, and none but Fred was content. Mrs. Whitfield was coldly savage, and declared she would not appear at the church or the breakfast. Conditions were changed, she said, since the engagement was made; and Rose Blackett, who had once been well enough, was no fit match now for the owner of the Hawse. Mrs. Blackett was in a state of chronic tearfulness, which made her poor eyes very bad. Rose was broken up out of all likeness to her former self, and her attempts at the old high-handed 'fastness' failed signally. Harvey was moody, irritable, feverish, uncertain; and the whole octave rang with an undertone of discord, which no one saw any means of preventing—it not being always possible for one's fingers to strike the true key.

The three friends were riding along the lane leading up to Lisson; Rose and Fred in front, and Harvey at some little distance behind—the lane being too narrow for three abreast. Fred was talking about Thursday next (it was Monday now) and talking naturally and lovingly—for somehow he had forgotten his drawl of late—

when they heard a terrific plunging in the rear, and then a heavy fall, as Harvey's horse—a wild, fiery, nervous brute—flung him suddenly to the ground, taking him at a moment of inattention when he was riding with a slack rein and his mind far away, so that he was thrown in a second, almost at the first start and plunge the terrified brute had made—frightened at an idiot lad of the place starting up from behind the hedge, yelling and flinging his arms abroad.

In another moment Rose Blackett, throwing her reins wildly to Fred, was kneeling by his side, holding his head against her bosom, and calling him her 'Beloved Harvey;' which he, stunned as he was and unable to reply, was not too insensible to hear and understand.

The carriage was sent for from Lisson, and the poor fellow, bleeding and terribly shaken, was taken to the house to be set to rights as soon as possible; and while they were carrying him through the hall Rose turned to Fred, who stood leaning against the lintel of the door nearly as pale as the wounded man, but a great deal more wretched.

'It has come out, Fred,' she said, laying her hand on his shoulder, the tears in her eyes, but with a more contented expression of face than she had had of late. 'I am very sorry for you,

especially as you have seemed to like me so much more really than you did ; but I cannot help it.'

'You are a dear, good girl, Rose,' said Fred ; 'and I have been a fool. But it serves me right. When I was master of the situation I fooled away my opportunity ; and now, when I would die to be loved by you, Rose, you have gone off to another.' He tried to smile, but his lips quivered, and he was obliged to turn away his head.

'Never mind, Fred,' said Rose. 'You will find someone else better suited to you, and more worthy of you than I am ; and perhaps you will come to me some day, and say : "Rose, you have been the best friend I ever had in my life," when you have a sweet little wife that you adore.'

'I don't quite think that,' said poor Fred ; 'but if you are happy, that will be something. At all events you are a dear, good girl ; and I love you more than you know of, or would perhaps believe. But that is nothing to the purpose now ; I have lost you, when I might have won you if I had been wise.'

They shook hands cordially, and parted ; and the next day Fred left the Hawse, and soon after went abroad. Rose and he did not meet

again till many years after her marriage with Harvey; and when they did, Fred was really married to the 'dearest little woman under the sun,' and Rose was a handsome matron, superintending her nursery instead of the kennel, and finding her children rather more interesting objects of care than Fan's puppies of olden time. She had saved altogether about four hundred a year out of the wreck of the grand Bella Juanita silver mines; and so on the whole did not do badly in life. Happiness has been found possible at even a lower figure.

MADAME DUFOUR

‘I WONDER who she is!’ said Walter Drummond, looking back as he left the churchyard.

‘Who?’ asked Kate Hyslop with a displeased air.

‘That lady in the blue and gold shawl, who sat opposite to us in church,’ he answered.

‘Oh! that red-headed woman?’ said Kate indifferently. ‘Why, she was a stranger, of course; what else should she be?’

‘But I wonder who she is, and where she comes from,’ repeated Walter with insistence.

‘Really, Walter, you are very odd! What concern can it be of yours, and why should you wonder about her at all?’ returned Kate with her iciest manner; and her betrothed, taking the hint, let the matter drop. But thought being free, he pondered all the more, and wearied himself with conjecturing: ‘Who can she be?’ and: ‘Is she going to stay here?’

Hinton, where they all lived, was not a

pretty place ; nor a very secluded place ; nor a place that led to anywhere else ; nor that was of any importance anyhow. It was just a dull English village without a history and where life went on from year to year in the same groove. So that the prospect of a beautiful young woman, a stranger to everybody, locating herself at Hinton was something to be noted as a phenomenon ; and Walter's curiosity was only natural, considering the circumstances.

Soon the whole place was astir with the news that a Madame Dufour, the pretty woman who had sat on Sunday in the chancel just opposite the vicarage pew, had taken Elm Cottage where old Miss Donne had lived ; and that she was busy furnishing it in a manner so costly as to be next door to wicked.

Here, then, was food for endless speculation, and guesses at the riddles set by charity or ill-nature. A lady, young, beautiful ; evidently rich far beyond the measure of the village ; with a foreign name and an English accent ; a madame with never a monsieur to the fore, yet not in widow's weeds ; not an inch of clue to her former history nor her last abode—what better amusement could Hinton have for the dreary winter months than discussing such a phenomenon, and quarrelling over the probabilities

of her worthlessness or her respectability? So far as that went, however, the majority of voices decided in favour of the former; and but a few of the more credulous, of whom Walter Drummond, the Vicar's only son, was the chief, stood out for the theory of her respectability—'until she should be proved the other thing.' Which was just the difficulty; proof on either side being exactly the one thing needed.

The stranger came regularly to church, which counted for something in her favour; and she was reported kind to the poor, and charitable beyond the common run of even generous folks. Not that Hinton quite endorsed this last trait. It had its own ideas about excess of any kind; and excess of virtue fared no better at its hands than if it had been a vice. Little by little, however, the lady's pleasant smile and genial manner broke down some of the stiffer prejudices which her strangerhood and unlikeness to Hinton laws of life had created; and after a sufficient time had elapsed to forbid the appearance of injudicious haste, the Vicar and his wife called on her—rather solemnly, it must be confessed, but with a good meaning at bottom.

The next step was to ask her to tea. Kate Hyslop was by no means well pleased when she heard of this arrangement; and, in general, Kate

Hyslop's wishes ruled the vicarage. But Mr. Drummond had certain notions on priestly duties which not even his heiress-ward could touch ; and this was one of them. He had taken it into his counsel that it was his duty, as the father of his flock, to usher in among them this outlying sheep of his fold ; and he did it ; though his future daughter-in-law tossed up her small, smooth head in disdain, and even the placid wife of his bosom looked dubious. So now Madame Dufour was marked with the right brand, and the whole parish gathered round her and bleated their welcome to their pastures. From having been a kind of exile among them, she became the most popular plaything of the day—Kate Hyslop alone refusing to bleat with the rest, or to burn incense at her shrine.

From the first there was a distinct antagonism between these two women ; and from the first Kate hated Madame Dufour, and Madame Dufour feared Kate. Those cold, steel-grey eyes of the young heiress, which no one had ever seen dark with love or moist with tenderness, were like weapons that seemed to kill all sympathy, all affection. Her calm voice that never faltered, her composed manner that never hurried, her set words that disdained to trip over a colloquialism, her whole being, controlled, conventional, of the

strictest order of the Pharisees—what a contrast she formed to the bright, versatile, pleasure-loving Madame Dufour, whose fair face was like a mirror wherein you could read her ever-changing moods, and whose voice and manner had all the tremulous shades which belong to a sensitive nature—or consummate art! But Kate saw no beauty in her.

‘She fatigues me with her vivacity; she sickens me with her theatrical sentiment; and her affectation of grace is too transparent for anything but contempt,’ she said scornfully, when asked if Madame Dufour was not charming.

While Madame Dufour on her side said, with a pretty action she had with her hands: ‘Miss Kate Hyslop? She is the ice-maiden bound in chains! She makes me shudder as if she were a ghost.’

‘Or a detective,’ said Kate with emphasis; when some good-natured friend reported to her what the new-comer had said.

The word struck. It was bitter and cruel; but then bitter things and cruel always do strike; and Miss Hyslop’s sharp surmise made the round of the parish underhand, folks whispering among themselves: ‘She is not so far out, isn’t our Vicar’s young lady; and maybe the detective will light on our fine Madame some day, at last.’ But no one said this to Madame herself, and the pretty

stranger still lived in the sunshine and nourished herself on incense.

Walter Drummond's habits were changing. From a docile, steady, methodical young man, in to time, proverbially good-natured if not very bright, and as innocently candid as a child, he was fast becoming irregular, uncertain, and reticent. He was always out, and no one knew where; nor would he explain when he came home, silent and depressed as no one had ever seen him before. Neither his mother's business nor his *fiancée's* pleasures touched him.

Kate looked on at this change, and said nothing. She had evidently her own mind on the matter; and Mrs. Drummond, who knew her, was quite aware of the future preparing for her boy. But she wisely left them to fight it out between them, knowing that the struggle had to come, if not about one thing then about another; and Kate had to be crowned queen when all was over.

'Walter, I want you to ride with me to-day,' said Kate one morning.

'I am very sorry,' he answered hurriedly; 'I cannot to-day.'

'No! Why?'

'I have the boat to look to,' he said.

She fixed her cold eyes on him steadily, and her look brought the blood into his face.

‘Are you going to visit Madame Dufour again?’ she said scornfully. ‘You need not speak, Walter, your looks are answer enough,’ she added. ‘Pray don’t add falsehood to the list of your lately acquired accomplishments. It is what I have long suspected; what, knowing you, and therefore knowing how weak you are, I foresaw from the first.’

‘And what is it you suspected and foresaw from the first, may I ask?’ said Walter angrily.

‘Why should I say it? You know as well as I; and I don’t care to dig in ploughed ground,’ she answered slowly.

‘I will not allow your insinuations!’ said Walter with vehemence.

‘Will you not? But if I choose to make them?’

‘Then I will not listen to them,’ he said.

‘Your friend shall, Walter,’ said Kate deliberately.

‘Kate, you are trying me too far!’ he cried. ‘What folly is this you have taken up?’

‘No folly at all, Walter—on my side. I will forbear to characterise what you have

taken up, on yours. I only know the fact, that all these long absences of yours—these mysterious affairs which occupy you from morning to night—mean simply that you are spending the time you deny to us with this Madame Dufour. I say no more, and insinuate no more—no more, at least,’ she added with a slight sneer, ‘than your own conscience echoes.’

‘And if I do see Madame Dufour at times, am I not master of my own actions?’ said Walter.

‘I also of my own thoughts,’ she replied.

‘You are free to be your own mistress for all time and in all ways, so far as I am concerned,’ said Walter indignantly, a great hope irradiating his face as he spoke.

‘Thanks,’ she answered, her monotonous voice as calm as ever. ‘You mean that for magnanimity, I dare say; but I shall not accept it. I always have been, and always mean to be, my own mistress under all circumstances; you know that, Walter. But we have wandered from our point—will you ride with me to-day?’

‘I told you before, I cannot,’ said Walter sullenly.

‘Very well,’ she answered; ‘but neither shall Madame Dufour.’

She rose on this and walked steadily and

quietly out of the room, leaving Walter with the sensation that a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet.

Kate had seen clearly and spoken truly. Walter had carried to the beautiful stranger the inner wealth of a nature which, until now, had been given to no one. The fascination which had begun on that first day when he saw her sitting opposite to him in church, fair as a flower, the sun touching her golden hair like an aureole and dyeing the blue and gold of her Indian shawl into a kind of mystic drapery fit for an angel or a saint, had gone on until now, and had gone on increasing. He had engaged himself to Kate Hyslop two years ago, it is true; but it was a thing that had been done for him, more than one which he had voluntarily done for himself. His parents wished it; Kate's father had wished it; and Kate herself wished it—which clenched the matter. So Walter, who was merely a good-natured, un-exacting, inexperienced boy as yet—a manly young fellow enough in frame, but a little 'soft' in character by having been kept close to his mother's apron-string all his life—drifted into the affair as boys of his kind do drift into such a thing, when manifestly prepared for them by the potent influences of home.

At the best, however, Kate was only to him like a sister; not always so nice and not always so dear.

When Madame Dufour came, the chained fountain leaped into life and melody. To say that he loved her is to say little. It was adoration, more than common love. It was the worship of a devotee for a saint, combined with the tenderness of strength for something weaker, more yielding, less helpful than itself. He loved her as he had never loved before, as he had had no prevision he could ever love at all. And she?—Well! she first played, and then she learnt.

That sensitive face, with its ever-changing expression, like the tremulous sunshine that flutters among the leaves, grew daily more tender, more responsive. Yet in word and act she affected a staid, half grave maternity which merely fascinated her adorer the more. He was 'her boy,' she used to say with those sweet lips of hers that looked as if they had not been in existence more than twenty years at most—Kate Hyslop always said she was long past thirty, and 'made up;' and the youth—just two years older than she looked—longed to tell her that, if he were a boy to her in the humility of his devotion, the nothingness of his personality, he

was a man to himself in the passion and the power of his love.

But now, what was he to do? Brought face to face with Kate's not unfounded suspicion and not unrighteous wrath, he felt that he must take a step as decided as it would be final. He must choose which—abandon Madame Dufour, or break with his betrothed; cease to visit the one he loved better than his life—and, if so, what reason to give her, she who was so far above him that he dared not even hint at his love?—or he must disappoint his parents, mar his future prospects, break his plighted word, and distress one whose only fault was her love for him and her claim to be loved in return. Like many a braver man, Walter postponed his decision; waiting for events to steer him and clear themselves.

At luncheon-time he rushed off to Elm Cottage, thinking only that, come what would, at least he should see her once again.

Was he expected? Half lying, half sitting on the sofa, was Madame Dufour, dressed, as she always did dress, in the most exquisite, the most seductive manner; indeed, she did not dress, she draped. On a small table, covered with ruby-coloured velvet, stood wine, fruit, and flowers, and a large bowl of old Venetian glass, full of

ice. It was ethereal food for luncheon ; but Madame Dufour was ethereal in her food, and often spoke with laughing scorn of the materialistic English miss who ate and drank like a man. Kate Hyslop had what is called a wholesome appetite, and liked cheese and beer.

‘Ah, my boy !’ she said with her caressing accent and young-motherly manner, holding out both her hands to him as he came in, but not rising to receive him. ‘Toujours le bienvenu !’

‘How kind you are to let me come,’ stammered Walter, flinging himself on a footstool by her side. He was pale and agitated, but his eyes told the old story as eloquently as they had always told it. ‘How can I ever thank you for all your kindness to me ?’

‘By not assuming that I have been kind at all,’ she said ; ‘or,’ lightly touching his shoulder with her fan, ‘by putting it the other way, Mr. Walter, and counting me grateful to you.’

The young man flung back his head. Madame Dufour’s fair face flushed, and her eyes drooped at the love that was in his.

He took her hand and carried it to his lips. ‘Better than the wealth of the world !’ he murmured in a low voice ; but she, playfully, pulling one of his brown curls, said in a pretended anger that was more bewitching than even her

kindness : 'That is what you deserve, naughty boy! You presume too much, mon ami.'

'And the punishment will make me transgress again,' said Walter timidly, still holding her hand.

'*Fi donc!* was there ever such a forward boy? *Un petit écolier comme ça! Ma foi!* you are beyond your age, Master Walter.'

'But not beyond your——' He stopped, and trembled visibly.

'My forbearance? *Soit!* But we women are all weak,' she said, helping him out of his difficulty.

'Not all,' said Walter with a rueful recollection of Kate; and Madame laughed, as if she had divined.

Just then a ring came to the front door.

'*Tiens!* who can that be?' she cried with surprised eyebrows.

Walter first crimsoned like a schoolboy caught, and then turned pale like a man before whom is a struggle unto death. He knew who it was, clearly enough; and Madame Dufour read his knowledge in his face.

So, the battle had come, had it? *Bien!* She was ready. Let it come, if it must; and the sooner the relative strength of each was known the better.

She did not raise herself from her lounging attitude, but even curved herself round into softer lines. The tender manner grew more tender, the sweet, low voice more caressing, the creeping touch of her long white hand more velvety, as it first pushed back the golden fringe that shadowed her forehead, then rested on Walter's chestnut head. The tremulous face no longer dimpled with smiles or quivered with sympathy, but took on itself a mask half mocking, half impassive, and wholly irritating to an antagonist. And then Miss Hyslop was ushered into the room, to find the siren in her most dangerous mood, surrounded by her most bewitching accessories, with her own lover, who was also her rival's, sitting at her feet, worshipping.

'Miss Hyslop! how very kind!' said Madame Dufour in a pretty, languid voice. 'A rare pleasure, but none the less welcome,' she added, offering her hand, but still keeping to the sofa and those gracious undulating lines and curves into which she had posed herself.

'I came for Mr. Drummond, Madame Dufour; not to pay you a visit,' said Kate in her stoniest manner. 'Walter, you are wanted at home.'

'Poor Walter! I hope he is not to be

scolded very severely at home,' said Madame Dufour with a mocking accent, and a tender glance at the young man.

'Who wants me?' asked Walter indifferently, playing with Madame's little dog.

'I,' said Kate; and she said it straight and hard.

'Your pleasure?' was Walter's reply, not looking up.

'I prefer not to discuss my affairs in public,' said Kate. 'I want you; that is enough. So, if you please, Walter, come—and at once.'

'I am engaged,' said Walter; 'I cannot.'

'Madame Dufour, I must ask your assistance,' then said Kate, turning to her rival. 'Will you kindly command Mr. Drummond to obey me?'

'What an extraordinary proposition!' laughed the siren. 'What do you take me for, Miss Hyslop?'

'What do I take you for?' repeated Kate very slowly, and eyeing her keenly. 'Well, I might take you for many things—for an actress, say; or an adventuress; for a runaway; perhaps for a woman who ought to be—where shall I say?—in Millbank for forgery, like that Clara Bell the papers were so full of just before you came here; or I might take you

for an honest woman, intending no evil to anyone, and careful to avoid scandal. You see, Madame Dufour, a stranger as you are may be anything. Who knows ?'

During Kate's speech Madame Dufour's face had not changed a muscle, save the faintest quivering of her upper lip, and the sudden starting of big drops both on it and on her brow.

'You have a fertile fancy, Miss Hyslop,' she drawled out with a little laugh. 'Really your roll-call of possibilities is so crowded, I cannot remember half my probable characters.'

'Have you taken leave of your senses, Kate ?' demanded Walter sternly.

'No; but you have,' she replied, as sternly. 'Again I ask you, Walter, will you leave Madame Dufour and come with me ?'

'And I answer, I will not,' said Walter, taking the long white hand in his. 'You have made it necessary, Kate, that someone should protect Madame from insult; and I will be the one to do so.'

'Poor simpleton !' said Kate with disdain. 'You are a greater fool, Walter, than I took you for; and I never thought you very wise. However, your wisdom or your folly is no business of mine. I have done my duty; and you must act as you choose.'

Without another word she turned and went out; and as she shut the door after her Madame Dufour sank into Walter's arms in a violent fit of sobbing and weeping; and Walter, holding her to his heart, kissed away her tears, and told her that he loved her better than life itself, and that he would devote his life to her service, now and for ever.

'Dear boy!' she said at length, smiling through the disorder of her passion. 'It was worth the anguish of enduring her insolence to know that I have such a *preux chevalier*—that I have rescued such a gallant soul from so ungenial a fate!'

And while this scene was taking place Kate was walking homeward through the lane, muttering, half aloud: 'I wonder if that shaft struck true! I could not read her face. I wonder if it is she, after all! That foolish fellow! But I will not let him go, all the same. He suits me; and he will soon forget that wicked woman when he finds out what she is, if she is as I believe her to be. If she is not——'

But this thought displeased her, and she put it from her to indulge the dream that Madame Dufour was, what a certain letter—received that morning from London in answer to one of inquiry

from her touching a suspicion she had entertained from the first—gave cause to suppose.

Kate was so far wise in her generation that she could hold her peace. Having shot her bolt, she could afford to wait the result. Accordingly, when Walter returned home late in the evening, she received him with the quiet stolidity common to her, and neither by word nor look made the faintest reference to the stormy scene that had taken place at Elm Cottage that morning. If anything indeed, she was kinder than usual to her lover; while he, fuming and excited, found himself in the unpleasant position of a man engaged to two women at once, and held to his bond by the one he was burning to throw over. She prevented, too, the reproaches with which his father and mother were charged; and gained golden opinions for her own part for the generous affection they said she displayed towards one so unsatisfactory.

‘Oh! I know him. He will come back to his better self as soon as this horrid creature has gone; and go she shall,’ she said, smiling in a frosty manner; while Mrs. Drummond kissed her, tearfully, and the Vicar called her ‘blessed among women.’

‘Mamma,’ she said to Mrs. Drummond two

or three days after this, during which they had scarcely seen Walter; nor had she noticed a certain letter of his, giving her back her freedom and breaking off the proposed marriage: 'I want you to ask Madame Dufour to dinner to-morrow.'

'My love!' said the Vicar's wife in a tone of astonishment; 'why have that odious woman here?'

'Do not ask me, pray,' she answered. 'I wish it.'

'Well, my dear, of course you know we all study your wishes in everything,' said Mrs. Drummond humbly. 'I am sure, if you like it, I have no objection; and I suppose papa will have none.'

'Thanks. A gentleman is coming from London,' then said Kate indifferently.

And Mrs. Drummond's eager note of demand was stifled in its birth by the impenetrable iciness of look that her future daughter-in-law turned full upon her.

'Then there will be two to dinner?' she said, a little anxiously.

'If Madame Dufour comes, yes,' answered Kate.

'Very well, dear,' returned Mrs. Drummond. 'I will see to the dinner.'

‘What is the meaning of this, my boy?’ asked pretty Madame Dufour, when the servant brought in a note from the Vicarage, requesting the pleasure of her company at dinner to-morrow at half-past six o’clock.

Walter was startled, too. What did it mean? Had his father and mother taken to heart how things stood with him; and were they prepared to receive her he loved as their own? Had Kate spread a snare?—or was she, too, minded to be generous, and to give up what she could not hold?—or did it all mean nothing more than an ordinary act of politeness—a piece of parsonic hospitality to one of the flock?

‘Shall I go?’ then asked Madame.

‘Oh, yes! yes!’ exclaimed Walter.

‘You wish it, my boy?’ As she spoke she passed her hand caressingly over the youth’s forehead.

‘Wish it! Do I wish to live in heaven!’ he cried. ‘Don’t you know it is heaven to me where you are?’

‘But this terrible Miss Kate; will she like to see me?’

‘Oh! don’t you know that my mother would not have asked you else?’ answered Walter innocently. ‘Kate is the mistress of the Vicarage, not my mother.’

‘And she will not insult me again? She will not punish me, Walter, for what I cannot help—your love for me; and’—in a lower voice, a shy, sweet, tremulous voice—‘mine for you?’

On his knees before her, his fresh, young, fervid face turned upward to hers as she bent so gracefully, so tenderly towards him, his glad eyes dark and moist with the passionate love which at last had found its home, Walter poured forth his thanks, his adoration, his protestations that there was nothing to fear and his assurance of defence, in a breath; and Madame Dufour, smiling, radiant, lovely, turned to her writing-table and wrote her acceptance of the invitation on pink scented paper with a golden monogram and coronet on the top.

‘You see,’ she said, with a pretty laugh, pointing it out to Walter; ‘I am really a countess! but this is the only sign of my state in which I indulge myself. A countess with a couple of maids in a remote English village! Trop ridicule, n’est-ce pas, mon ami?’

Ah! what loveliness, what humility, what condescension, what rational understanding of life! All this and more Walter trolled forth as his song of love; and Madame played the symphony to his praises by her own praises of him.

The gentleman from London came, true to

his time; and Kate took it on herself to show him the one local lion, namely, the church, with its old monuments, its fine Norman arch, its quaint carvings, and the like. Their talk was interesting meanwhile; but it was not on the things they went to see; and a listener might have heard, 'Madame Dufour,' 'Clara Bell,' 'forgery,' 'actress;' 'clever escape,' 'known bad character,' uttered more than once. But it came at last to a conclusion, the gentleman saying warmly: 'But after all, miss, you have been the cleverer of the two,' as they turned up the lane to the Vicarage, to dress for dinner—and Madame Dufour.

Exactly at the half-hour she came; lovelier, more entrancing than ever, thought Walter, as he flew into the hall to receive her. He brought her into the room, leaning on his arm, his poor, foolish heart bounding with pride and joy. Kate and his as yet unannulled engagement with her were alike forgotten as he led his queen, his saint, his idol, to his mother; and it was with difficulty that he prevented himself from saying out before them all: 'Mother, take her to your heart; she is your daughter!'

He did, however, hold his peace, and only Kate read him clearly and shrugged her shoulders over the words.

Graceful and soft were the few sentences said, in her slow, half-lisping voice, by the fair-faced stranger to Mrs. Drummond, who received them awkwardly, half-timidly, as if conscious of the storm that was brewing. And then she turned to the Vicar, and made the old man's eyes sparkle with the caressing charm she threw into such an ordinary salutation as that of a guest to her host on entering. To Kate she bowed with a pretty little air of triumph, and glanced hastily at the back of the gentleman from London, standing slightly apart and in the shadow.

'I think there is some one here who knows you,' then said Kate Hyslop, slowly. 'Mr. Plumstead, you know this lady, I think?'

The gentleman from London turned quickly round.

'An unexpected meeting, Miss Clara Bell,' he said with a cruel laugh, and tapped her expressively on her shoulder.

One fleeting spasm of fear and agony transfigured her loveliness to horror as he spoke—a wild, terrified, hunted look; just the failing of a moment—and then the candid blue eyes looked up straight into his, the sweet, small mouth quivered into its usual half-shy, half-plaintive smile, the graceful body swept a long, low

courtesy, and the silvery voice said smoothly, 'You are under some mistake, sir. My name is Madame Dufour—Caroline Dufour—and I have not the honour to know you.'

'Game to the last, I see!' laughed Mr. Plumstead coarsely. 'But the day of reckoning is come, my lady, and your fine airs go for nothing. You have been wanted for some time, you know, for that little mistake you made about young Charlie Lawson's name to that cheque you presented. By the look of things, I'm afraid we shan't get much out of the fire there,' he added, in a kind of aside; 'and now I have found you, I don't mean to let you go again, I promise you. You have no right to complain; you have had a pretty long innings, all things considered.'

'Walter! kill him!' shrieked Madame Dufour, turning wildly to her young lover. She had no need to urge him. Already his hands were twisted in the neckcloth of the detective, when, quick as thought, Mr. Plumstead drew a truncheon from his pocket, and gave the boy a blow that rendered further interference from him impossible.

'My boy! my boy! You have killed him!' cried the miserable woman, flinging herself on her knees beside him. 'Walter! look up! Speak to me! Brave, good, innocent boy, speak to me

once again!' she kept on repeating, while sobs without tears—those terrible sobs of fear mingled with anguish—shook her like a leaf in the wind, as she crouched close to the pale face, kissing it wildly.

'Insolent! abandoned!' said Kate in deep tones, striking her hands from Walter's face. 'Your place is not there.'

'Ah! but I loved him!' pleaded Madame Dufour with unconscious pathos. 'Whatever I may be, I loved him!'

'Take her away,' said Kate sternly. 'She has stood between us long enough.'

'They shall not take me!' she screamed; but Mr. Plumstead bent over her quickly; and, before she well knew that he had taken her hands in his, he had slipped on a pair of handcuffs, and had her at his mercy.

'Loosen his cravat, throw water in his face, and keep him quiet when he recovers; and don't fret, madam,' said the detective to the poor mother, who was weeping violently, as he prepared to pass out, leaving the boy lying as if dead on the floor with no more apparent concern than if he had knocked over a rabbit. It was all in the way of his profession—merely a unit in his averages—and he knew he had not killed him.

'Now, then, my beauty,' he laughed, turning to the poor wretch alternately cowering and raving in his grasp; 'to your house, if you please; and then we will get our little business settled.'

They passed through the village, he so far consenting to appearances as to cover with a shawl the golden head which had so lately borne itself in triumph and which was now so bitterly abased, and to conceal the cruel handcuffs that shone among the bracelets on her wrists. She was a prize worth taking; and he was pleased with his day's work.

Years passed, and Kate Hyslop, for all her money and unrelaxing determination to marry Walter, was Kate Hyslop still, and the terror of Hinton society, which she ruled with a rod of iron, and kept in the way of virtue by a severity that knew no moment of weakness, and a vigilance that never relaxed. And Walter Drummond, a sad, grave man, prematurely old and always bearing his heartbreak about him, was living in London in an isolated, miserable fashion enough, seeming to have little to do with life any way, and to have parted for ever with happiness and hope. His father and mother were dead, and he had made no new

friends. The only interest he took in anything was in prisons and reformatories. These he visited constantly. Constantly, too, he wandered about the lower haunts of poverty and vice; or, suddenly changing his method, he would roam about the Park and the fashionable squares, always searching, always hoping, and ever pursuing what he never overtook. His search became a kind of monomania with him; but he never saw again the woman he sought, though day by day he said to himself—now the moment had surely come, he would find her to-day; and when he had found her, he would take her to his heart lovingly, reverently, as of old, and in his love he would cleanse her of her stains. He never thought how time would have treated her. He looked for the golden hair, the fair flower-face, the sweet, shy smile of the early days; and once, when he gave a grey-haired, haggard, broken-down beggar-woman half a crown in the street, he did not know why she touched his heart so sadly, or why she woke a chord that vibrated in remembrance, but had no echo in recognition.

At last, one bitter winter's night, he died. He had wandered restlessly all the day, feeling so near and yet so far off—as if she were walking with him side by side, step for step, as